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SPOKEN IN ANGER.

SPOKEN IN ANGER.

A Nobel.

“Aye, they ruled him, those fierce passions.”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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SPOKEN IN ANGER.

CHAPTER I.



DOOLINGTON HALL was just the place to pass the autumn vacation, after the weary season work of "doing" the Park and other fashionable gatherings—be they balls, concerts, or flower-shows—all equally tame and spiritless, after the first novelty is over. There you might feel yourself thoroughly at home; to ride, shoot, fish, flirt; or, in short, one and all, as the fit took you. You were sure to meet plenty of pretty women and pleasant

men; indeed, many of the belles, who had seemed so coldly affected when you met them, but a few weeks ago, at some London ball—there changed into merry, lively girls; and the lazy, spiritless talk of the listless swells, became eager and animated under the genial roof of dear old Sir John Doolington.

“*Dum vivimus vivamus*” was his motto, and he allowed his guests to live up to it—not that he was an epicurean—honest John Doolington had never in his life forgotten the lesson learnt at his mother’s knee, and his living up to the motto was only an innocent reflecting of the sunny side of life on all who came within his reach.

It was a fine old mansion, truly, with its turrets rising grandly above the dark green foliage of the well-kept grounds;

and from many of the windows the view was really superb. A long winding avenue formed the carriage drive, shaded on either side by tall elms, whose topmost branches laced themselves together so that, at noon-day only a few faint rays of sunlight could penetrate.

In driving slowly through that avenue, after a short absence (the Hall carriage was always sent to meet me at the little station, and old Foster, the coachman, *would* drive slowly, as though he was proud of and felt the beauty of those fine old sheltering trees), I have always realized a feeling of quiet happiness, mingled with an unuttered wish that the drive might last longer. All so peaceful, it seemed to speak a welcome in the tiny songs of the birds, and in the soft murmur of the wind, as it rustled caressingly among the sheltering

leaves, and say, "Here for a while you may cast off the cloak society has made you don, and be yourself again, as thoroughly as you were in the old bygone boyish days."

Gone, alas! those days—with the friends that made them so pleasant, and the joys that brightened them; those happy thoughtless days! Gone! gone as completely as if they had only been the bright visions of a summer night.

Ah! you, my friends, who have played with me at Rugby, rowed and smoked with me at Oxford; though our after lives may have caused us many a heartache, say, had we ought to grieve for then? No, then we stood bright and joyous in the garden of life, little thinking how, perhaps, our own hands were destined to crush its pleasant flowers, and make all around us a howling wilderness. Fated so, though to

the world you and I may be debonair rising men, still, from the hidden wreck of our own hearts, we love to gather the memory of those boyish days, still love to look back upon ourselves light-hearted and joyous, as we were before that grey old tyrant, the world, had made us cynical.

Entering the Hall from the grand entrance, you come into a large square vestibule, with windows at right angles, looking out on the flower garden on one side, and on the stream that runs through the grounds on the other.

On the particular morning when my story opens, I think the breakfast-room would be the best ground whereon to introduce you to Sir John's guests. It is the morning of the promised hunt, and ere long the horses will be brought round. So, fair reader, you must take them as they

are, quickly eating the dainties with which the table is spread; it is only the tardy ones who are still eating; many have finished and are gathered in tiny groups, talking eagerly of the coming sport; so that it is rather a disorderly room into which I must lead you.

One of these groups has gathered round Sir John Doolington, a fine old specimen of our English squire, ruddy of face, large of limb, free of speech, and genial in his perfect kindness of heart. He is talking now of the success of the last Derby, for Sir John, like most men of his stamp, keeps a splendid stud, and is rather famous for contributing to our national sport. Perhaps my fair readers do not care for sporting conversations and betting calculations. They go to the racecourse, dressed in rainbow hues, to flutter their kerchiefs

and fans, and afterwards say languidly, "Well, really, I hardly knew the colours, my time was so taken up with that stupid Captain So-and-so's flatteries." Whereas the Captain, in spite of his flatteries, had a keen eye for the winner, and could give you a page or two, *par cœur*, out of every sporting man-about-town's book. But then it would not do for our ladies to be well up in turf slang, so they need not fear that I shall bore them.

Seated at one end of the long breakfast table, and making a little party of themselves, are some dozen ladies and gentlemen; it is evident by their riding gear that they intend following the hounds. They have just been joined by Marion Doolington, Sir John's youngest child. Her present close-fitting dress shows off to advantage her tall, slight, graceful form,

and the stylish riding-hat lends piquancy to the gentle, high-bred face. It is not a face that many would call beautiful ; but still, when you know her well, there is something about it that wins love and confidence ; something Madonna-like in the soft curve of the lips that seldom close, but part gently over the pearly, even teeth ; in the downy whiteness of her complexion, relieved by so faint a tinge of pink that it lies like a delicate shadow on her rounded cheeks ; in the soft waves of her auburn hair, and more still in the sweet lustre of her large dark eyes. Some said those eyes had gained her the reputation for beauty she enjoys among the *beau monde*. They are gentle and winning like herself, eyes that never flash, but seem made to plead with rather than to command, the fulness of flesh between the eye and the eyebrow

giving a singularly noble expression to the upper part of the face ; the long lashes fall over them tenderly, not alluringly—there is soul in them, and mind too, for Marion Doolington is a bit of a *bas bleu* if the truth must be confessed, and her literal classical translations would put many a University man to the blush.

The conversation is eager and animated ; but although Marion takes her part in it with some show of interest, it is easy to see her thoughts are elsewhere, and she glances at the door rather anxiously now and then. This fact is soon noticed by Rose Fleming, a bright-faced little brunette, who says—

“I wonder where Lord Clowden is this morning. If I were you, Marie, I should take him to task for laziness.”

Marion colours slightly, for it is well known that she and Lord Clowden Straf-

ford are "engaged." But before she can answer, the subject of the remark enters.

He is a young man about thirty years of age, with a face decidedly handsome, full of expression, fire, and determination; the nose small and aquiline; deeply set, penetrating dark grey eyes; the mouth perhaps a trifle too firmly closed, but shaded and softened by a black, drooping moustache; several inches above the middle height, with a form which, though slightly built, seemed possessed of great strength.

"I think we shall have a splendid day," he remarks, taking his seat by Marion's side with that easy characteristic *non-chalance* that proclaims a man who has passed a lazy life in good society. "It's clearing finely, and not too much sun."

"I suppose you've been studying the atmosphere, Strafford, before you turned

out?" says Captain Adderly, stopping in a spirited flirtation with Rose. "It was so like you, to make quite sure. Now, I never even went to the window; but then you know rain, hail, or shine is all the same to me, for I never get beyond the second fence; if I manage a third, by lucky chance, I feel quite a hero."

"You surely don't go home again?" Marion asks.

"Not quite that," he laughs; "but please don't make me confess. I could not survive the contempt of such a Diana as yourself, Miss Doolington."

"We all know how lazy his highness the Capitaine is," says Rose; "but as you are my chaperon, I'll see that you do your duty to-day."

A few chairs further down is seated Lieutenant Fortescue Browne, and the county

heiress, Maud Hastings; she a languid, blue-eyed blonde; he a handsome, but peniless young Guardsman. She has just declared her intention of not following the hounds, which pleases him immensely, because he hopes, while riding in a desultory fashion through the cover, to find time and opportunity to ask that all-important question. He rather fancies that she likes him; and yesterday's post brought some very dunning epistles from his West-end creditors. So, with his usual assurance, the young soldier hopes to bring his affairs to a pleasant crisis.

Some of the ladies are going to drive, and one is going to stay at home—a slight, pale woman, who plays the part of hostess with quiet grace. This is Sir John's eldest daughter, Lady Evelylin. Her face is very interesting—so young, yet round the gentle

mouth are lines that tell of some great grief, keenly felt, yet bravely borne; she had, indeed, known sorrow. Five years ago Carrie Doolington, then a merry girl of nineteen summers, went from her father's house the idolized bride of Sir Charles Evelylin. They intended spending the honeymoon at Naples; but hardly was the ship out of harbour, which was to take them there, than the terrible cry of *fire!* rose; and Sir Charles, frantic with agony, succeeded in saving his fair wife of a day, only to sink himself in the sea of flames, never to rise again. And now, though five long years have passed, and Marion has grown from a mere child to a graceful woman, her sister, pale and gentle, like a drooping lily, still binds her golden curls under that badge of woe—a widow's cap.

Presently there is a general move, and a getting to horse or carriage, many delaying a few moments to shake hands with the new arrival—young Squire Hardrow, a well-known crack rider. It is a pleasant sight watching them. As I have before said, Sir John keeps good cattle in his stables, and it is his especial pride that Marion should always be well mounted, for she rides right royally, and is the boast of half the country round; not that gentle Marion Doolington is at all a “horsey” woman, simply a carefully taught, dauntless, graceful rider.

Lord Clowden assists her to mount, and stands for a few moments holding her bridle rein, the fresh morning breeze fanning her cheek to a brighter pink as she bends down to listen to his whispered “nothings.” Together they form as pretty a picture as the eye could rest upon—the

soft shadow on her fair face, the admiring love stamped on his—the misty background, and noble piece of horseflesh, with bright eyes, proudly curved neck, and chafing hoof.





CHAPTER II.



INE host of the Doolington Arms was standing at the door of his silent hostelry, looking the picture of lazy content, as he watched the heavy volume of smoke cloud from the pipe held between his lips.

It was early in the afternoon, and his bar was never full except in the evening, when the villagers met to hear the news of the day, and prove their ignorance by discussing politics; although now and then it would have done some of our representatives good to have heard these sons of toil pithily argue, comment, and criticise. They

were loyal enough, too, to the Lord of the Manor, for Sir John had been returned at each election ; and many would shake their heads sadly when they talked of the dear old landlord's possible death, for there was no son of his to take the fine freehold that had hitherto passed in one straight line from generation to generation ; and even to the quiet village had travelled rumours of the wild, extravagant heir-at-law.

Any stranger astir in the little hamlet was watched with interest, and Joseph King, the worthy proprietor of the Doolington Arms, took the pipe from his mouth to gaze with vague curiosity at a tall, elegant-looking woman, holding a little boy by the hand, who was toiling up the dusty road that stretched before him ; rather a strange-looking child, he thought ; bright fair curls

contrasting with his large black eyes ; and a firm, proud mouth, which perhaps marred the childish beauty of his face. There was character, too, shown in the brave disregard of his own fatigue, although his partner walked slowly and wearily. The landlord could not see the lady's face, as she wore a thick crape veil ; but her whole dress proclaimed her to be a widow. She seemed in some perplexity, and glanced up and down the road, which prompted him to say—

“ Can I help you in any way, mum ? Is there any one you wants to find ? ”

“ How far is it to Doolington Hall ? ” she asked. And as he stooped to catch the low, monotonous voice, he noticed that her black was very worn and shabby.

“ A little over two miles, mum ; down there to the left, past the parsonage. ”

“Two miles!” she said, more to herself than to him; “and I am so tired.”

“Would you rest a little in my bar, mum? there ain’t nobody there now,” said our host, civilly; for he felt instinctively, despite her shabby black, that he was speaking to a lady.

She stood for a few moments irresolute; at last, looking down at the child, she said, in a low voice—

“He is so tired;” then, out louder—
“Thank you;” and followed him into the sanded room, where she sank wearily into the chair he placed for her, and throwing back her veil, revealed a face of singular beauty. She did not look more than four or five and twenty; yet there was something in her face more painful than real age—a premature shadow, which did not age or disfigure, but which stamped out for ever

all sweetness and gentleness. Her great blazing black eyes were sunken deeply, her full red lips were drawn in tense, tight lines, and the drooping corners told of weariness and bitter sorrow; the pale cheeks were slightly pinched, and the cheek bones rather prominent; yet in spite of all that, her face was strikingly beautiful. She sat for some time holding the child in her arms, with her large eyes fixed vacantly, and the delicately-marked eyebrows drawn, as if in pain. Suddenly she put the little boy down, rose up, took two or three staggering steps forward, and would have fallen, had not Joseph King caught her in his arms.

“Wife! wife!” he called loudly, looking stupidly at the strange, fair face, that lay so death-like on his arm. A large red-faced woman came quickly.

“The lady’s fainted,” she said, not listening to his explanation. “Put her on the parlour sofa in here.”

“Your ma has only fainted, dear,” she said, kindly, to the child, who was crying loudly. “She’ll be all right again in a moment.”

But good Mrs. King, like many of us in giving consolation, “had counted without her host;” for more than an hour the strange lady lay in a dead faint, only opening her eyes at last to close them again.

Both host and hostess, who had been trying all kinds of remedies, now looked at each other, with great concern in their honest faces.

“You had better go for Dr. Blake, Joe,” said his wife at last.

He needed no second bidding; and returned presently with a kind-looking, but

rather professionally pompous old gentleman. What country doctor is not pompous? In town the hard-worked practitioner may sometimes unbend; but in the country any one with a character to keep, and a decent amount of respect for his fellows, must always act, walk, and talk "shop," if he wishes to throw any halo of reserve round himself.

"This is very serious," said the doctor, examining the lady critically. "She must be put to bed immediately. Do you know who she is?"

"Ah!" he said, when he heard all that our host knew. "Going to the Hall, was she?" Then turning to the child, he asked—

"What's your name, my little man?"

"Vivien Stanley," answered the boy, in a clear, childish voice.

“That’s a fine little fellow!” said the doctor, drawing him to his knee. “And you must not cry; mamma will soon be well again. How old are you, Vivien?”

“Getting on for six,” he said, raising his deep, dark eyes.

“You’ll be a big man soon,” said the doctor, smiling kindly, and running his fat white fingers through the child’s soft, light curls; thinking the while how full of un-childlike beauty the little face was.

Mrs. King, who with the help of a rosy-cheeked handmaid had carried the strange lady upstairs, now came to say that her patient had opened her eyes, and seemed recovering.

Stopping to take breath, in the door-way of the neat, quaint room, Dr. Blake noticed how fragile and fair the widow’s face was, almost as white as the pillow on which it

lay. As he came to the bedside, she opened her large bright eyes, and fixed them on him in astonishment.

“You have been taken ill, my dear madam,” he said, answering the look. “Here, Mrs. King, bring some port wine, please.”

She seemed better after she had taken some, and a faint colour tinted her cheeks.

“Shall I be able to get up now?” she asked, pushing the heavy dark hair from her face, with a tiny thin hand, on which a wedding-ring hung loosely.

“Oh no!” said the doctor, smiling kindly. “You are very ill, and must make up your mind to lie here for some time yet.” Then noticing the shade on her face, he asked, “Is there anyone you wish to see at the Hall? As you can’t go to them, they might come to you.”

“I want to see Carrie—Lady Evylin—very much; I wish some one would tell her. I feel very tired.”

“The best thing you can do, my dear madam, is to go to sleep, and I will go round to the Hall, and tell Lady Evylin. She will come and see you soon, I have no doubt. What name shall I say?”

“You are very kind; Mrs. Stanley is my name,” said the strange lady, looking up with a smile of such brilliancy that the good doctor, despite his fifty years, felt he would do a good deal to earn such another.

Passing quickly through the bar, he nodded kindly to the child, who was eating a cake, and making friends with a large tabby cat; down went the cake, and the tiny feet ran pit-a-pat after the good old doctor.

“I want mamma—where is mamma?” he cried.

“Now, my good little man,” he said, stooping down, “you run back, and upstairs, and take a peep at mamma, but don’t make any noise, because she’s asleep, and when I come back I’ll show you my horse.”

Lady Evylin drove back in the doctor’s gig. Mrs. Stanley was an old school-fellow of hers she explained, and she had not seen her for many years.

Vivien was standing quietly watching his mother, who was sleeping, when they entered. Dr. Blake took him away as Lady Evylin sat down by the window:—the long dusty road, patched here and there by the heavy, homeward-bound figure of some son of toil, and far away fringed by the leafy outline of Doolington

Park, with the Hall turrets pointing spireward to the cloudless sky. Inside, the white-curtained, clean little room, with its quaint efforts at adornment, and its crowded out-of-date furniture, and lying there, the pale, still woman, with tangled heavy waves of down-flung hair, contrasting in ebon blackness with the snowy pillow, and pallid face on which already lay the grey shadow of death.

There was this in common between the two women, both had suffered. Like two fair flowers, the pitiless storm of fate had beat on both ; but the one had bowed her head in meek submission, only to raise it in added beauty to the sun-god's smile ; the other had stood erect, in brave defiance of the heavy drops that at last had bowed her down, broken and bruised, to the earth. After all, it is not the troubles we pass

through, but the spirit in which we take them, that stamps our lives and characters. Lady Evelyin, in the furnace of affliction, had learnt the sweet lesson of a Saviour's love, reflecting the "perfect peace, that passeth all understanding," on her gentle, quiet face. She had loved the pale worn woman who lay so near death's door, and memory brought back the bright girlish face, flushed with youth and happiness, the glad starry eyes, and merry laughing mouth; she could remember too, when the hair that lay so dank and heavy now, had floated loosely round the graceful southern figure.

The pet of the *Pension* had been Isabelle D'Almez in those bright thoughtless days—gay, winning, and impulsive, the orphan ward of a rich old Frenchman, who thought he did his duty by his dead sister's

child when he placed her at Madam Besset's select seminary; but the high-spirited girl fretted at the restraint that found her there, holiday and school-time alike, and one day she was missing. They searched for her long and ineffectually, and the girls returned to their studies, saddened by the mystery that covered their companion's disappearance. Long after, Lady Evylin had met her, an altered, faded woman. She had seemed hurried, and fearful of being questioned, and Carrie had begged her, if ever she needed a friend, to send for her. This was the result, and tears filled Carrie's kind blue eyes, as she thought how little longer that pale weary woman would need a friend.

"Carrie!" The word was spoken sharply, and Lady Evylin started as the quick voice broke the solemn stillness.

“Yes, I am here, dear Isabelle,” she said, rising and bending over her.

“Oh! Carrie, it was very kind of you to come; you promised to be my friend if ever I needed one! I do need one now, not for myself, but for my child. Will you, Carrie, be a friend to my darling when I am gone?” The face was painfully drawn with anxious pleading.

“Put your mind at rest, dear Isabelle,” said Lady Evylin, “I will adopt him and love him for your sake.”

“God bless you, Carrie!” she cried, passionately, taking her hand and impulsively pressing it to her lips; while tears, strange visitants, it seemed, to those hard bright eyes, welled from their dark depth. “I have suffered so, Carrie,” she continued, still holding her soft cool hand between her own hot feverish palms; “and I took this

journey to-day meaning to ask you to take my child, and then—but God has saved me from dying by my own hand. I shall not live long now.”

She lay back, still holding Lady Evylin’s hand; the slight hum of life outside contrasting with the perfect silence of the sick-chamber. Presently she spoke again, and her voice was low and faint.

“ You remember when we were all painting for the examination, I chose for my subject the old ruins; and Madam used to let me go every Tuesday to the mount to sketch. One day, I was just finishing my morning’s work, when a strange gentleman came up; he admired my drawing, suggested two or three slight improvements, and from that we fell into conversation on other subjects. We met often after that. He talked of his travels, of scenes I had long wished

to visit; he told of his love for me in words of burning passion, and filled my heart with romantic reciprocation. One day Madam had scolded me for some slight fault, and I told him of it; he urged me to go with him—to be his wife. I thought my life at school a drudgery, Madam a tyrant, and that no one else loved me. So I went, and the next morning we were married by a French priest. Then I was perfectly happy; we travelled—passed our time in visiting all the beauties of Nature. My husband's love seemed only to grow in tenderness, and I looked back to my school-days as the darkest portion of my life. We were staying at a little hotel in Altenah, overlooking the blue waters of the Aah, where he rowed me every evening, and I would sing to him as we glided over the peaceful stream.”

She paused ; there was a smile on the wan face, as though the memory of that happy time was still sweet ; but it faded into a look of fierce passion as she continued.

“ We had not been at Altenah long, when a woman came to stay there too, a painted, bold-faced creature. My husband slightly started when he saw her, and I asked him who she was. ‘ I don’t know,’ he said, ‘ some actress I should think.’ She stayed there some time ; they never seemed to speak to each other, and I thought no evil ; till one evening, as I was returning from a lonely ramble, I saw them both standing together. He held her hand in his, and bent lovingly over her ; while she looked up in his face with her bold, bad smile. I could not hear what they said ; but as I watched them, he drew her to him and

kissed her. And then they parted and returned to the hotel by different roads. I was there before him, and when he entered I met him with a volley of hot, passionate reproaches. He listened calmly, in an attitude of careless ease, with a satirical smile disfiguring his handsome face. When I had finished he said coolly, 'You may spare yourself all future reproaches, madam, *you are not my wife*, our marriage is not worth that;' and he snapped his fingers with insolent contempt. Can you imagine my feelings, Carrie? I, who till that moment had thought myself his wife! I, who had loved him with passionate intensity! I stood speechless, trembling with fury, and could a thought have killed him he would have laid dead at my feet. When at last words came I cursed him, and then, weak and exhausted, I staggered from

his presence. I have never seen him since. But," she added, starting up, with a wild light in her eyes, "I could die happy if I thought my curse would follow him, and I shall die cursing him."

"Hush, darling!" said Lady Evylin, gently; "remember who said, 'Vengeance is mine.'"

"And you think he will be punished?" she asked, eagerly.

"Indeed I do, dear, in the Lord's good time;" and Carrie Evylin looked down at the pale, passionate woman with the grieved, tender pity of her pure soul illuminating her fair face.

"But our marriage was perfectly legal," Isabelle said quickly, the warm blood flushing hotly as she read the pity in the other's eyes. "I proved that it was, and then I sought him, for my boy's sake, to

make him take back his base lie; but I have never seen him since that dreadful day—more than six years ago.”

“Poor darling!” Carrie said, bending down and kissing her tenderly.

“Ah! Carrie,” she whispered, “I can trust my little one with you. I don’t think you will ever regret this day’s charity. In my pocket is a parcel; will you take it and keep it for my boy till he is grown up? It is all I have to leave him; and you will take care of it, wont you?”

Soon after Dr. Blake came in with Vivien; the child’s face was flushed and animated, but the smile died away as he entered the room. Carrie lifted him up to the bed, and his mother put both her arms round him, saying as she kissed the little resolute face passionately, “I could not live without you, darling, my precious darling!—

You will be happier, I know. Listen, Vivien; try and understand what I am going to say. Your father, Vivien Stanley—I called you after him—wronged me fearfully. Make it the object of your life to find him; make him own you. But remember, Vivien, I charge you with my dying breath to accept no love from him; to revenge the sorrow he brought on us, and never forget that you are my vengeance.” Dr. Blake, seeing how exhausted she was, took the weeping child in his own arms; and Isabelle lay back, quite still, so still that they wondered if she yet lived.

“Carrie,” she said suddenly, in a low, broken voice—they had to stoop to catch the words—“Pray for me, Carrie; perhaps your prayer may—pray——”

As the sweet, earnest voice rose pleading

as though at the very mercy-seat of God, and the golden sunset lingered on the fair bowed head, the weary, passionate spirit of Isabelle Stanley passed silently away.





CHAPTER III.



GAY sight was the ball-room at Doolington Hall; richly dressed, lovely women fluttered here and there. The swell of glad music, the perfume of choice flowers, the glitter of priceless gems—all that could delight the eye, and charm the sense.

Down the long room swept Marion Doolington, and if it be not a *gaucherie* to say that this fair *demoiselle* ever looked her best, she certainly did on the present occasion; and more than one was heard to remark, that they had never seen Miss Doolington look so pretty as now. Young

Squire Hardrow, who was that evening entrusted with the care of two fat sisters and one pretty cousin, was just in the midst of a waltz with Marion, and as she glided gracefully round, steering her rather clumsy partner free of collision, Lord Clowden, from an out-of-the-way corner, watched her with loving admiration.

Maud Hastings and Fortescue Browne had it all to themselves in a dimly-lighted conservatory; and, to judge from the expression of both their faces, the poet had not sung in vain of the charms of

“ A sly flirtation
’Neath the light of a chandelier,
With music to fill up the pauses,
And nobody by to hear.”

Rose Fleming was amusing herself with no small satisfaction, listening to the rather slangy talk of a young Guardsman, who had ridden hard for thirteen miles to be present

at the ball ; and perhaps the bright dark eyes of Miss Rose may have troubled him slightly on the way. If so, the light down on his upper lip may well excuse the folly ; for how many of us, oh ! my brethren, looking back into the past, cannot remember the time when a whole day's hard riding would have been amply rewarded by a sweet smile from Julia's rosy lips, or a bright glance from under Lilian's drooping eyelids ; but, *laissez-aller*, that was in the days of our hot youth, you know. But even now, when our beards are grown, and our brow just a little lined may be, can we be sure of a kind welcome, without a slight inclination to hurry, and a careless disregard for the after penalties of slighted nature in the shape of rheumatism and gout ?

“ Oh ! Clowden,” said Marion, coming up

to where he stood, "I've been looking everywhere for you. Will you let me introduce you to Miss Dashwood; she has not danced once this evening?"

"Who *is* Miss Dashwood?" he asked.

"Why," said Marion, laughing, "I can hardly tell you. I never saw her myself until this evening. Major Dashwood has lately become one of papa's tenants, so we were obliged to ask them. There she is, sitting alone by the fernery. She does not look very formidable, does she?"

Clowden turned to look at the fair object all alone by the fernery. He saw a plump, round-faced girl, who could not have been more than seventeen. There was so much unstudied nature in the careless attitude, so much honest enjoyment expressed in the open rosy face, that she looked even younger.

“She must be very lonely there,” Marion pleaded, as she put her hand through his arm. “Come, wont you?”

“Well, I suppose I must,” he answered, with the air of a martyr; “but remember, Marie, I’ll revenge myself by looking you up for the next waltz.”

It was a very bright face, Lord Clowden thought, that Miss Dashwood raised to his, after a rather too formal introduction bow. There was a good deal of latent merriment in the corners of the full mouth, sparkling from under the lashes of rather pretty blue eyes, and dimpling the round, rosy cheeks; but her toilet did not so well please his fastidious taste. Most men like to see a pretty woman well dressed, and Clowden Strafford was no exception to the rule. He hated, above all things, to see a girl attired in the primeval fashion of a

plain white muslin gown, girded by a piece of blue silk ; and this, with the addition of some of the same deep blue binding her golden hair, and encircling her full throat, completed Miss Dashwood's attempts at adornment.

"Are you fond of dancing?" Clowden asked, by way of saying something.

"Oh yes," she answered, raising her frank blue eyes to his ; "and I am so glad you came to me. I was getting rather lonely by myself."

"Is your father with you?" And Lord Clowden listened for the fresh clear voice.

"Oh no ; papa is quite an invalid ; he does not go out much. At first he did not like my coming alone ; but I begged and coaxed him, so that at last I got my own way—I generally do—and Jane is coming to fetch me at twelve o'clock. Papa wanted

me to go home at eleven. Just fancy ! and this is the first ball I have ever been to."

"Have you never been to a ball before?" said Clowden, rather amused, and at the same time drawing mental comparisons between her and Miss Doolington, the balance weighing heavily in favour of the latter, in her perfect toilet of shimmering satin, soft tulle, delicate drooping hot-house flowers, and sparkling gems.

"No," she answered, laughing, and tossing back her golden hair. "Never in my life ! Is it not shocking, coming without a chaperon ? — a real chaperon I mean ; because papa asked Lady Evylin to take care of me ; but I don't see her anywhere. She is very lovely, is she not ?"

"Ya—as," he said, looking lazily round ; and it just then struck him that he had not seen Lady Evylin all the evening.

“Oh, don’t worry yourself about that,” he continued ; “I’ll take care of you.”

“Will you?” she answered, looking up and smiling childlike.

“Yes, if you’ll let me ;” and he looked down with a bright smile. “I am sorry to say I am engaged this dance, but may I have the one following?”

She handed him her programme, and watched him pencil his name in it with bright eager eyes, blushing very prettily when he returned it, with a look that any season belle would have perfectly understood in its open admiration.

“She is rather a nice little thing,” he thought, as he walked lazily away in search of Marion. “Wants polish, and all that kind of thing ; but, after all, one sees so much that is artificial, so it is rather a pleasant change watching nature.”

He found Marion looking rather pale and weary, so he asked her to take a turn with him in the grounds. She smiled assent. He fetched a warm shawl, and wrapped it carefully round her, and drawing her tiny gloved hand through his arm, they passed through an open window, from the glare of gas, beauty, and fashion, into the calm silent moonlight. They walked on for some time in perfect silence; she was drinking in the subtle beauty of the evening, the rich music in the distance, the presence of the man she loved—all seemed in harmony, like a sweet pause in life; and she turned her glad eyes up to those silent witnesses, the stars, and felt as though words would break the spell.

Clowden was thinking of the fair woman by his side; there was something in her soft pure face that almost awed him; in-

instinctively he felt that the light she carried was not of this world ; and, cynical worldling as he was, it humbled him ; and yet it did him good to know that this angel-woman loved him, and would one day be his wife.

“ *Then* I shall become quite a new creature—a saint in fact,” he would say to himself.

How many of us there are in this imperfect world of ours, who put off till a “ *then*,” the casting away of the cherished robe of sin ; which, when the future has become present, they find, like the silken garment of the pilgrim of old, has grown into the very flesh.

They walked on till all festive sounds died away in the distance, and nothing was to be heard but their own footfalls, and the sweet notes of the nightingale.

“How silent we are!” Clowden said, with a slight sigh.

She laughed, a low sweet rippling cadence. “But why do you sigh, Clowden? is it possible that silence can oppress you while Nature herself seems holding communion with us?”

You see Miss Doolington was rather romantic; but still, if any of her remarks savour too much of the “stage effect,” please remember, oh, most cynical reader, that she was in love, and admit the truth if you cannot sympathize with the line that says—

Cupid guides the poet's pen.

“No,” Clowden answered, “silence does not oppress me, but I love the sound of your dear voice so well, that even your favourite nightingale fails to charm me if you are silent.”

“ Oh, Clowden, what flatterers you men are !”

“ And do you blame us, Marie, when it is one of the many accomplishments a man must learn if he wants to get on with that touchy, exacting old dame Society ?”

It was not Lord Clowden's usual way of answering a doubt as to the honesty of his love speeches ; but he had long heard what a sweet temper Marion Doolington possessed, and had often wished for an opportunity to rouse her ever so little to anger. He knew many women who would have “ flashed ” at less than this, and the unchanging mildness, if I may so call it, of this fair lady's face rather bored him at times, and he often wished she was a little more brilliant.

“ I don't know,” she laughed, “ it is very pleasant, of course ; and I suppose we poor

women ought to be very grateful for the nice sugar-plums Dame Society provides for us—but,” she added, with a slight touch of satire, “it must be very difficult always to think of pretty speeches.”

He smiled as he pressed the tiny gloved hand.

“Well done, Marie!”

And then looking down with that soft love-light, eyes like his know so well how to assume, said earnestly—

“There can be no question of flattery in anything I say to you, dear one, loving you as I do.”

In enumerating Lord Clowden’s good points I forgot to mention his voice, which was singularly soft, when he chose, but hard and cruel when his temper was ruffled or his will disputed; but now the rich mellow tones falling on the still

night air, went straight to his listener's heart; and he thought, as she raised her soul-lit eyes to his, that she looked scarcely mortal, with her pale sweet face and shining snow-white garments.

As he stooped to replace the shawl that had fallen from her shoulders, she said—

“Let us go in now, Clowden, Carrie will think I have hardly kept my promise of taking her place to-night.”

“Is Lady Evylin ill?” he asked, quickly.

“Oh no!” Marion answered; and as they walked slowly towards the house, she told him the sad story of Isabelle Stanley, and how Carrie had that day stood by her deathbed.





CHAPTER IV.



WHEN they re-entered the ball-room, several gentlemen came to Marion, with reproach in their eyes and open programme. Lord Clowden left her laughingly settling her debts, and passed by a side-door into the hall, walking quickly down the long corridor till he came to the smoking-room.

It was a large pleasant room; one-half was fitted up for billiards, and there were two or three card-tables and chessboards, for Sir John gambled a little on a modest scale; and one corner was crowded with downy sofas, low armchairs, and inviting

couches. This was where the smokers were wont to congregate; and many a scandal, and many a *bon mot* dated its origin from the gossips who were generally busy in that corner.

From all I have seen, I think it hardly fair to give our sisters the palm for carefully studying their neighbours' business. A party of women, over afternoon tea, is certainly dangerous, but I fancy most of us would prefer even their thoughtless or spiteful play with our character to the dark hints, carefully worded intangible accusations, or ominous silence, expressive of so much among our club loungers. Especially if the men are either very old or very young, for youth and age are hard judges; the former have seen too little, and the latter too much, of this cynical world to be charitable. Women rarely malign a

man, except for some good private reason, and then the very palpable spite of the calumny renders the slander comparatively harmless ; but with men it is different, if they know anything about a man detrimental to his credit, however far fetched, it is pretty sure to go the rounds.

The room was empty when Lord Clowden entered, not one of the guests, and there was many a hard smoker among them, had been found brave enough to enjoy his weed in lonely silence, while light feet were keeping time to gay music, and lovely eyes shone their brightest. He was glad of it, and he flung himself on to the first sofa with a sigh of evident relief: he had come there to think and be alone. Marion's story about Isabelle Stanley had struck a cord that had laid mute for many a year, and as he lay there, in the lonely

smoking-room, the dead past rose hauntingly from its unhallowed grave.

Before him stretched a verdant, woody landscape, bright with soft subdued summer light, and there, where trees twined a loving mixture of varied green, sat a young girl, radiant in glad half-childish loveliness, her loose light-flowing robe, her mantling long dark hair, with here and there a dash of soft purple, like the intensity of the raven's wing, the soft outline of her graceful bending figure, and down below the grand old ruin standing defiant and grim, a mockery to itself and time.

Then the scene changed, and he stood with her, his arm round her, and her glorious dark eyes upturned to his, shining in their deep love like twin stars through their long jetty fringe; above them the pale cold moon, and all around the dim

uncertain shadows of night. He heard again his own voice trembling in its deep passionate pleading, and her low sweet answer, "Yes, Vivien, I will go with you and be your wife."

Then again, the painted walls of the little chapel, with the slanting light from the mullioned window falling full on the sweet, half-shy, downcast face, while the dull monotonous voice of the priest pronounced the words that should have bound them for life together.

Then he watched the changing scenes, each one fairer than the last, each completed by love's greatest treasure, his beautiful wife—his Isabelle—his priceless gem! Fairer it seemed to him, as he lingered over her memory, than mortal woman could ever be again.

Then the last scene rose before him, in

all its bitter agony, cutting him to the very soul like a pointed knife.

Again he saw, like a phantasm, the soft, loving, girlish face in its quick passionate jealousy, the grand eyes blazing, and the round cheeks dyed the deepest crimson, suddenly grow old and haggard, the warm blood fade to a ghastly pallor, and a wild fearful horror gleam from the large expressive eyes at his cold heartless words—words he would now have given much never to have spoken—words that had parted them for ever and ever.

He felt a wild fierce desire to see her again, even if dead, to feed his hungry eyes on her lovely face ; and he rose and paced the room, large drops of excitement and agony beading his brow. “Isabelle ! oh, my lost Isabelle !” through the dark night and dull grey dawning he paced and cried,

and knew no weariness. Truly the spirit has great power over the body, and at times proves its eternity by utterly disregarding humanity's bane, Frailty !

The sun was high in the heavens when he mounted the stairs to his room. There was no time to think of rest, so he bathed and redressed, and combed back the dank, dark hair from his bloodless, haggard face. Then taking his hat, he passed out into the fresh morning air, across the Park and down the long dusty road till he came to the Doolington Arms.

Joseph King was busy sweeping out his bar, humming a little tune in a subdued bass, his round puffy cheeks, rosy with the exercise. He stopped abruptly, broom in hand, when Lord Clowden entered, and coming forward with an awkward bow, waited for him to speak.

“A lady died here yesterday,” said Clowden, speaking with evident difficulty. “I knew some one of her name years ago. Can I see if it is my friend?”

“Well, my lord; I knows you, for Tom Barton pointed you out to me the other day as the gentleman who is going to marry our young lady; and if your lordship will excuse the liberty of my saying so, I hopes as you’ll be very happy, and——”

“Thank you—thank you, my good man,” he interrupted, impatiently; “but about the lady who died here yesterday. Can I see her?”

“Well, my lord, the missus is out after the cows; but I know,” he added, his face brightening, “if you wont tell on me, my lord, I’ll just give you the key, for I see she’s left ’em on the table.” And our

worthy host darted into the little back parlour, returning presently with a large bunch of keys.

“This is it,” he said, selecting one, and reading the label on it—“‘Room No. 4,’ my lord; that’s where the poor young lady’s lying—just at the top of them stairs, my lord—the first room as ever you comes to.”

Lord Clowden pressed a couple of sovereigns into the man’s hand, saying—

“You need not mention my having come here; after all, it may not be my friend.”

“All right, my lord.” And he held the door open for him to pass through.

Clowden Strafford walked slowly up the narrow staircase. At the top was a door with No. 4 on it; he turned the key and entered, closing the door behind him. The

bed was covered with a large white sheet ; the blinds were down, but the window being open a little at the top, the fresh morning air came through, slightly stirring the sheet which clung in ghastly folds to the form beneath. He started ; could it be her breath that so faintly moved the shroud ? He advanced quickly to the head of the bed—laid his hand on the sheet—paused for an instant—and then raised it.

No need to fear the sight of that sweet, dead face, Clowden Strafford ! Pale and beautiful—all the hard, pained lines that of late had marred its living loveliness, effaced by the first gentle touch of death. The grand eyes closed for ever, their long black lashes lay softly shadowing her marble cheeks ; the sweet mouth, not quite pallid yet, but tinted like the pale pink of a rare sea shell, was smiling as it had done per-

haps in the happy southern home, when the baby form lay lulled to rest in the arms of the pretty French mother, who died long ago.

Her long dark hair had been twisted round loving fingers till it lay in smooth, glossy curls, framing the fair face and white marbly throat, that rose, full and swan-like, from the frilled band of her shroud. The small thin hands were meekly crossed on the still breast; and he noticed how loosely the wedding ring hung—that wedding ring he had placed on a plump, pink hand six weary years ago. He trembled from head to foot as he stood there, and covering his face with his hands, sobbed as he had never sobbed since childhood.

“Oh! God forgive me!” went up from his stricken heart. Verily, those small still hands had great power in awakening

the callous, atheist soul of this cynical wordling.

The storm soon passed, and he raised his head hastily, and looked round as though fearful that other eyes might have seen his weakness.

A faint sunbeam crept through the blind, resting on the sweet dead face, as if it would warm those calm lips to a living smile. He stooped to kiss her ; but drew back quickly when his heavy moustache just touched her pale brow, as though fearful his lips might taint its pure repose ; and then, after one long lingering look, he dropped the sheet, and passed out.





CHAPTER V.

MAJOR DASHWOOD began life as a cornet in the 10th Hussars. Young, good-looking, belonging to a crack regiment, possessing also a rent-roll of some thousands a year, of course he had the *entrée* to most of the best houses. He was early elected a member for Crockford's, and two or three other West-end clubs; and men were glad to have it known that they were on terms of intimacy with Dick Dashwood. If not remarkably handsome, he always looked a gentleman: even when very young he was distinguished for a calm, unchanging courtesy of manner. Riding a thorough-

bred hack in the Row, driving tandem on the Epsom Downs, waltzing with some fair season belle, or lounging in the Park—there was always that unmistakable air about him which the French call “*Mi Lord Anglais*.” He was passionately fond of games of chance, always sent a horse or two to the Derby, and was well known at Tattersall’s.

Ill-luck never seemed to rouse him ; he often sat till daylight at *écarté*, losing largely, without a shade of vexation on his calm face ; and once, when a friend came to tell him of the fall of a horse he had backed heavily, he said, smilingly carelessly, “*My usual ill-luck, my dear fellow, my usual ill-luck.*” They dined together, and afterwards went to the Opera, and all through the evening Dick’s spirits seemed as calmly cheerful as usual.

But his wonderful armour of self-control was pierced at last. In an evil hour, while waiting at Bath for a financial storm to blow over, he met and married a vain, under-bred woman, the daughter of a rich brewer. Looking forward to his father-in-law's wealth, young Dashwood and his wife gave themselves up to every possible extravagance. Possibly there was great want of refinement in his wife; but, anyway, the match was not a happy one, as kind friends found out some months afterwards. He consoled himself for his matrimonial mistake with unlimited "play"—snug little bachelor parties at his rooms in St. James's, and now and then a discreet flirtation; but, as a rule, women of any character soon began to avoid him, he became so very notorious.

Mrs. Dashwood drove a pair of ponies alone in the Park; was always to be seen

at garden-party, ball, or opera unattended, save by some lady friend, thus proclaiming to the world how badly her husband treated her.

Richard Dashwood had thoroughly valued his position in society, and it pained him more than he would have liked to own when his married friends dropped asking him to their houses, and ladies who had formerly been pressing in their cordiality passed him with a slight bow; while even the wildest of his acquaintances blamed him.

Suddenly the crisis came. His father-in-law died bankrupt just when he needed a pull through, having heavily backed an unsuccessful favourite; and being, moreover, in real danger of getting cashiered for debt. Nothing was to be done but to change into a cheaper regiment and go abroad; where the hardships of barrack-life

soon told on Mrs. Dashwood, who died after a few years' unhappiness and ill-health. After twenty years' foreign service, being put on the staff as brevet-major, he returned to England, a totally altered man. The calmness, which had been his greatest charm, had altogether deserted him, and the few friends who remembered him in his bright days were pained and astonished at the nervous, irritable invalid he had become.

The only living being who could tolerate him for long was his daughter Lucy; and his frequent fits of grumbling seemed unable for a moment to cloud the sunshine of her bright, cheerful little heart. Not that she was a paragon young lady, this wild little Lucy Dashwood; ignorant and unsophisticated to a degree, but warm-hearted and easy to lead; possessing great depth of

untried love and latent devotion, a very woman in every impulse, untutored in any way by the artificial training of society. Poor little Lucy of late had allowed her thoughts to dwell a little too much on Clowden Strafford's dark handsome face. His deep-set eyes haunted her memory, driving away all the gay little happy fancies that before had contented and gladdened her life—her music, her flowers, her usual daily occupations no longer interested her. She no longer ran about the house a bright little sunbeam, but loved to be alone, to think about him, to recall all the meaningless, foolish things he said to her; the deep rich tones of his voice, and, above all, that kind, bright smile that had accompanied his parting words.

She told no human being of this strange, dawning love; but she would talk about

Clowden to her little dog Snap, and of course that sagacious animal sympathised with her to the best of his small power, wagging his tail and rubbing his cold little nose against her wee white hand ; and then she would kiss Snap, and tell him what a love of a dog he was, and how handsome Lord Clowden was ; and thus dallying, the untutored childish feet first trod the mysterious labyrinth of love.

One morning, about a week after Lucy's first ball, she ran bright and glowing from a before-breakfast romp with Snap, into the room where her father was seated, drinking his coffee and reading the *Times*.

"Why, Lucy, what a noise you make," he said, in sharp, thin, querulous tones. "You have given me quite a headache."

"Good morning, papa darling. I am so sorry," she said, putting her arm round

him, and pressing her fresh young face against his.

They were a great contrast, this father and daughter: his pale, worn, aristocratic face, large, restless, grey eyes, and thin-lipped sensitive mouth; she dimpled and rosy, in her bonnie English beauty, with her pretty flowing golden hair and merry blue eyes—blue as the forget-me-nots she had fastened in her waistband, in memory of Clowden.

We would whisper that very gently, for the dawning of love in a fresh young heart is a sacred, solemn thing. Oh! how will it end?—who can tell? Sometimes beginning in purity, fed by holiness, it ripens on earth for eternity's glory; sometimes—oh! how often—it is crushed to the earth, and trodden into aching dust by the iron wheel of Fate; and sometimes it withers, tainted

and broken, in the foul atmosphere of crime.

Major Dashwood knew nothing of his daughter's newly-awakened love: always more accustomed to be studied himself than to study others—the altered manner, the dreamy look that was often in her blue eyes, and, more than all, her reticence about the ball, told no tale, and excited no suspicion. She eat her breakfast in silence, and the major read his paper. Suddenly she said—

“Do you want anything, papa dear? I'm going out presently.”

“Go to Dr. Blake, and tell him to make me another bottle of sleeping-draught,” he answered. “Tell him to be sure and make it stronger than the last. I did not sleep at all last night. And tell him I want some more of that nervine—don't forget, Lucy,

the nervine and the sleeping-draught; and—— Lucy, Lucy,” he called, raising his voice; but Lucy had gone. A few moments later she put her bright little face round the door, shaded by a large straw hat.

“Did you call, papa?” she laughed.

“Yes, madcap,” he said, smiling; “don’t forget to call at the post-office, and be home to dinner.”

“Is there anything else you want?” she said, demurely.

“Go away, you saucy child; and if you meet Mr. Palmer, ask him to drop in some time this afternoon.”

Lucy walked down the sunlit road looking a bright, plump, little fairy in her plain print dress and large shady hat, with her fresh young face just peeping from under its broad brim, and her pretty flowing hair

shining like threads of gold in the sunlight. The first person she met was Mr. Palmer, the curate. He was a tall, broad-shouldered young man, with a pair of honest brown eyes, and a kind, true face; slightly pale generally, but he got very pink while talking to Lucy; and the little coquette gave him some bewildering glances from under her broad-brimmed hat. He told her he was going to a funeral, so she wished him good-by, and tripped on to Dr. Blake's. He was out, the apprentice said, attending a funeral, but he would write down her message with pleasure.

"Every one going to a funeral," she thought; and as she walked quietly home she met the sombre, winding procession.

This was the funeral of Isabelle Stanley.



CHAPTER VI.

IN his new home, Vivien seemed very happy. Now and then he remembered his mother, and a burst of childish sorrow testified to the depth of his love for her; but as time wore on, he allowed Lady Evylin to take her place entirely. As yet, he had not been seen by Clowden, who always avoided the child; but one morning the Hall party were seated at breakfast when he entered, and took the empty chair always left for him by Marion's side. Vivien was admiring some pretty little charms she wore on her watch-chain, and as Clowden looked, rather anxiously, at the

small, downcast, animated face, he was struck by its rare beauty. He felt a sudden strong desire to take the child in his arms, but he repressed the impulse, and a cold hardness entered his heart as he did so.

“Oh ! auntie,” cried the little clear voice (Lady Evylin had taught him to call her mother, and her sister auntie), “here’s a little popgun. Shall I shoot you dead ?” And he pointed it straight at Clowden. But as he raised his eyes to his face, the animation died out of them, into a vague, wondering stare, and putting up his little hand he stroked his face, saying softly—

“Are you a picture?”

Every one near laughed heartily, and Lord Clowden, lifting his face higher than the soft little hand could reach, laughed too ; but there was a hard ring in his voice,

and he flushed hotly, and then paled to his very lips. But the child took no notice of their laughter, saying, as if to himself—

“It could not laugh.”

This made every one laugh more, and those at the other end of the table came to see what was the matter, so there was quite a little crowd round them.

“Aren’t I a prettier picture, Vivien?” said Captain Adderly, bending down his fair laughing face.

“Oh no, you ain’t a picture,” he said, shaking his curly head.

“Only Clowden, who is like a picture?” said Marion, interrogatively. “Where did you see it, dear—here?” And she opened a locket she wore round her neck with his portrait in.

But the child would not look at it.

“It was so big!” he said, measuring with his wee hands.

They all questioned him laughingly, but he could remember nothing about it, except that it was “so big.”

“I can’t think what the little fellow saw in me,” said Clowden, laughing. “’Pon my word it’s a rare joke,” and he laughed again, rather boisterously, for his heart was beating passionately, and his mind was full of anxious thought; to change the subject, he turned to Fortescue Browne, who was sitting the only silent one of the party.

“Dreaming of pheasants, Fortie?” he said. “I mean to make a good bag this morning, and I thought I heard hints of woodcock.”

This of course had the desired effect on a party of men, met almost entirely for a

good shooting season; and soon the ladies were deserted, guns shouldered, and the sportsmen departed midst waving of handkerchiefs and barking of dogs.

Lord Clowden separated himself from the rest. Their gay jests and noisy laughter irritated him, and soon he found himself alone with Fortescue Browne. Both were silent, and both seemed to take aim mechanically at the birds that came within range of their guns. This steady shooting was rewarded by twenty-six brace of pheasants by the time the call came for luncheon.

“You take the bag,” said Clowden; “I’ve done my share for to-day—I’m going in now. But what’s come to you? How silent you are. Nothing wrong, I hope?”

The young man reddened under his

scrutiny. "Well, the fact is," he answered, "I proposed to Miss Hastings last night, and—was rejected."

Clowden blew a prolonged whistle. "Why, I thought you were *such* friends," he said; "but cheer up, old boy; if I cared, I'd propose again, and if I did not, I'd propose to some one else."

"Do you think she would have me if I asked her again?" he said, eagerly. "I wish you would get Miss Doolington to talk to her, and see if she only refused me for fun. I rather fancied she liked me."

"Oh yes, I'll ask Marion; don't break your heart just yet. I've no doubt it will all come right."

With these comforting words he turned and walked away. He walked on quickly, his unloaded gun lying idly in his arm, feeling no temptation to slaughter any of

the birds that often flew most temptingly within aim. As he walked, his face grew pale, and his heavy brows knitted in deep thought. Puzzled and annoyed as he was, the soft caressing touch of those little hands had entered into his heart, rousing, unknown to himself, a tiny germ of love; and once a teardrop, small shame to his manhood, glistened on his dark eyelashes.

He stopped, arrested by the beauty of the scene, on the margin of the little stream that ran through Doolington Park. It had been well stocked with fish, but there was no one angling now; and the clear water ran rippling and dancing in the sunlight, or reflected a soft cool green as it kissed some drooping branch that, here and there, bent a light weight of graceful beauty over it; fanned into varying sun-

beams by the faintly-stirring wind, and further hidden by the bending foliage, looked dank and still under its burden of pure white water-lilies; while, far as the eye could reach, stretched the grand old Park, with its centuries of timber, and pretty graceful deer.

As he stood there, gradually the soft beauty that surrounded him appealed to all his better nature. In that fair solitude, worldling that he was, he began to realise, dimly perhaps, that life was given for a higher aim than the mere selfish gratification of the moment; and the glittering falseness of the charnel-house of sin glared in all its mockery as he stood in the pure presence of Nature; and, more than all, he felt the great claim that child had on him. *His son*, that he might be proud of; his son, who would look up to

him and honour him ; his son, who ought to take his wealth and lands, when he lay still in the cold vault ; his son, in whose firm mouth, child as he was, he read force of character and determination, whether for good or evil. The strongest of all love—a father's love—spoke loudly to Clowden Strafford by that quiet stream, and his heart yearned towards the tiny beautiful boy.

“ Why was she so jealous ? ” he muttered, savagely. “ It was all her fault we parted, and that I cannot own my child. ”

“ Why not own him *now* ? ” spoke his conscience ; but he shuddered at the scandal, and then Marion—he could not give her up. He must go on, there was no use turning back now ; no one knew anything of that first marriage, and surely it was no great harm robbing this child of a birth-

right he had never known, and would never be taught to expect.

And so the tempter reasoned away this man's soul. Who could expect to argue with the father of lies? Oh! that we could all copy the subtle wisdom of the sinless One, in all its wonderful simplicity—"Get thee behind me, Satan."

Clowden had not gone many steps further, when he suddenly came face to face with Lucy Dashwood. They had not met since the ball, and the girl started and paled when she saw him; he wondered why the little hand trembled in his, and mentally concluded that she was shy; so, smiling down on her, he tried by a few light commonplace questions to put her at her ease. "How she was? Why did she leave the ball so early? Did not she think the view very pretty?" All of which Lucy

answered with the blushes and dimples coming and going, and her bright hair half shading her downcast, changing face.

“What a nervous child,” he thought; “how frightened she is of me by daylight;” and a kind pitying smile, almost beautiful in its tenderness, softened his eyes—a look that lingered, cherished in Lucy’s heart to her dying day—a look that not all the hard, pitiless, passionate glances she later on received from those same eyes could ever obliterate.

“Where are you going?” he asked.

“I’m going home now; it’s tea-time.”

“May I walk with you?” and he bent his head low for her answer.

She looked up, a glad child-face, the blue eyes and fresh mouth smiling with pleasure.

They walked on for some moments in

silence, a tiny woman and a tall man; his eyes soft and clear, and just the shadow of an amused smile under his heavy black moustache. She looked up at him, and all her innocent, guileless soul went up in that look, stirring his heart strangely, for then he knew that she loved him.

“What pretty blue eyes!” he said, bending down and looking earnestly into them.

She smiled: she did not know that she ought to have looked annoyed at such familiarity, but she got so rosy red, that for pity he said nothing more till they reached the garden-gate of Lucy’s home.

“We’ve had a very pleasant walk; don’t you think so?”

“Yes,” she said, shyly.

“We’ve been rather silent, though; we must talk more next time, eh?”

Lucy looked up now. “Why, we’ve

hardly spoken six words !” and she laughed till he thought of trying to count the dimples. Her enemies would have said she was giggling, but Clowden thought it very pretty. He was by no means poetical, this hard man of the world, but many bright beautiful similes flashed through his mind as he watched the dimples chase one another on her soft cheek, like sunbeams on a roseleaf.

“ You dear charming little pet,” he said ;
“ wont you give me one kiss ?”

She put up her bright face so innocently, with so much childish confidence, that his conscience smote him, and he just touched the rosy cheek with his lips.

“ Who was that you were talking to, Lucy ?” her father called out, as she ran past the drawing-room.

“ Lord Clowden Strafford, pa dear !”

“Ah! the lord who is engaged to Miss Doolington,” he said.

But Lucy did not hear: she was up the stairs, two at a time, smoothing her bright hair, to look tidy for tea. It would have been well for her if she had heard, and saved the poor little soul from great bitterness. We can tear up a little sprig and the earth not miss it, but the rooting up of a great tree will leave a fearful chasm.





CHAPTER VII.



HERE are you going, Marie?" Lord Clowden said, as he met Marion just outside the Park gates one afternoon : she held a basket of beautiful hot-house flowers in her hand.

"I am going to the village on business for Carrie," she answered, as she put her hand in his arm.

"These flowers," she continued, taking one, a beautiful Gardenia, and stopping to put it in his buttonhole, "Carrie asked me to put on poor Mrs. Stanley's grave."

Clowden tore the flower impatiently from his coat, and threw it on the ground ;

then noticing the look of pained astonishment on her fair face, he said quickly—

“Forgive me, Marie, the scent made me feel quite faint. I don’t care for flowers, particularly hot-house ones.”

“Why, Clowden,” she said, laughing, “it was only the other day you said you preferred them to all others; but perhaps you are not well?” And she raised her eyes, full of loving anxiety.

“I am quite well, darling.”

They were alone in the long winding lane, so he stopped, and, drawing her to him, kissed the soft upturned face very tenderly.

“My own Marie! my beautiful darling!”

She looked almost beautiful as she stood there, a calm pure happiness illumining her pale face; the tall, willowy, perfect form, and the small head with its wealth of auburn hair, regally poised on her long

graceful throat. Yet somehow he found himself comparing her with Lucy Dashwood, and missing the rosy dimpled brightness of Lucy's childish face, the latent passion that slumbered in her blue eyes. That saucy piquant little face would have looked long in the glass, before it would have thought itself worthy to be compared with Miss Doolington.

All his life Clowden Strafford had been an atheist in the worst sense—a thorough disbeliever in all goodness. He was wont to gauge the character of man or woman solely by the temptations placed in their way. A man would be honourable, he argued, as long as it served his interests to be so. But on women, chiefly, the weight of his cynicism fell. He had, unfortunately, proved his theories correct. He knew that most of the high-born damsels in his set

would have married him for his wealth and position alone ; while lower down on the ladder of life—— Ah ! well, we all know the fearful power of wealth, high birth, good looks, and youth, if wielded for weal or for woe.

But since he had known Marion his standard of moral excellence had heightened considerably. The constant intercourse with her pure mind had partially driven away all evil thoughts, as shadows vanish at the approach of dawn. He felt that he must take the sandals of sin from off his feet before he walked hand-in-hand through life with this pure-hearted girl, and the soft sweet face seemed almost a reproach to the many dark acts of his past.

Yet with all this, there was something wanting. Marion was too calm, too good, he would say to himself ; but calm was a

better word to express how utterly she seemed above all human weakness. No one had ever seen her angry, jealous, or even roused in her love. Clowden Strafford, in whose breast passion ever reigned over reason, felt as though a fearful gulf separated him from his *fiancée*. Yet, strange to say, utterly different as they were, he had never loved another woman as he loved Marion Doolington. There was something of religion in his love, for Marion stood in the place of his God; and had she wished it, cynic that he was, I verily believe he would have knelt at her feet and worshipped with as much devotion as ever a good disciple of Rome prostrated himself before the immaculate Mother of God; and I have seen many carved Virgins with very much the same pure expression and passionless calm of Marion's face.

Marion was a deep student too; and many a learned old divine had been known to somewhat dread an argument with this fair classical scholar. Lord Clowden, least of all men, could sympathise with a clever woman; his ideas were Eastern in the extreme. According to his code, a woman had no business with *learning* of any kind. He had spent many years of his life in the Grecian Archipelago, and the soft-eyed, languid girls he met there came up fully to his ideas of female excellence, and rather disgusted him with English girls in general.

Yet, in spite of their entire want of sympathy, he loved Marion—not blindly, but truly—with all the depth of his strong nature.

Other eyes might be brighter and more passionate, but the clear truth that

shone in hers was strangely winning ; other women might captivate him for the moment with coquetry, but the sweet calm of Marion's face was very restful.

He had not long known her, when he realised that he had met his ideal, that she satisfied all the yearning of his nature for perfect, pure womanhood. She was always the same—a beautiful alabaster lily, copied by a skilful hand, but lacking the immunity to rain, heat, and cold, which cursed the real flower.

Yet, beneath all this, as beneath the fresh green quiet earth the unknown volcano bides its time, Marion possessed a heart—a heart beating and passionate, but a heart that had never yet been roused ; but which, once awakened, might raze to its foundation the calmness of a lifetime.

“ Marie,” said Clowden, as they walked

slowly on, "I promised Browne to get you to intercede for him with Miss Hastings. She refused to be Mrs. Fortescue Browne, he tells me."

"Why, Clowden," said Marion, "did not you know that she has been engaged for some time to Julien Leverson?"

"Indeed! Well, she's been playing fast and loose with poor Browne ever since she came down here."

"Ah! you men are such sad flirts," Marion said, smiling, "that I daresay Maud thought Mr. Browne was only practising for private theatricals; they say he acts so very well, you know."

"You naughty Marie" (and Clowden smiled fondly), "that's all the praise a man gets for loving one of your fickle sex."

They had reached the churchyard, and

both hushed their light talk as they entered. In a quiet corner, under the shadow of a large yew-tree, they had buried Isabelle Stanley. Marion knelt down arranging her flowers, and Clowden stood by her side. A strange calm solemnity seemed to fill the air, and the wind just stirring the leaves over Marion's head sent a strange thrill through him, and he moved two or three steps away.

"Oh! Clowden," said Marion, still bending lovingly over her flowers, "was it not sad to die as she did—not so old as Carrie? What a wicked man her husband must have been; don't you think so?"

Clowden did not answer; he was watching a dark cloud in the sky. Presently he said—

"We must hasten home, Marion, or we shall be caught in the rain."

They had hardly left the churchyard, when the big heavy drops began to fall in such quick succession that they had to take shelter beneath a tree.

"I hope you are not cold, my Marie," he said, drawing her to him, and looking tenderly into the small pale face.

"Oh no!" she answered, and for the first time during their engagement she nestled closer to him. "I rather like standing here, watching the rain fall so heavily."

"I had a letter from my mother this morning, Marie. She sends all kinds of sweet messages to you. I know she will love my little white flower."

The soft fair face was upturned, and the true eyes looked into his, full of sweet trust and faith.

Presently the patter of horses' feet, and

the rattle of carriage wheels, broke on the heavy air. It proved to be Dr. Blake.

“What, ho! Miss Marion, is that you?” he said, pulling up his dripping horse, and looking out, red-nosed and benign, from under the hood of his gig. “Please jump in, or you’ll be putting a long fee in the doctor’s pocket, and a sad pain in somebody’s heart.” And the old doctor smiled and winked, and flattered himself he had done his share of wit.

As Clowden helped Marion in, he said—

“I am sorry I’ve no room to offer you, Lord Clowden, but will you take this cloak? It will keep you dry, at any rate.”

With a comical look of disgust the young man wrapped the ugly old waterproof round him.

“I will send the carriage for you, Clowden,” Marion cried, as they drove off,

looking very fair and pure, perched up in the gig.

He felt strangely lonely there; the black lowering sky overhead, and the long, empty, darkening road, with nothing but the heavy durging drip, drip to enliven the solitude.

“Hang it!” he muttered, as he drew the despised cloak closer round him, trying impatiently to light a cigar. At last the thin blue smoke curled upwards, and he leant back against the tree, trying to make the best of his uncomfortable shelter; and his thoughts wandered on, not with the gentle pure girl who had just left him, not with winning little Lucy Dashwood, but with the woman who was crumbling to dust beneath the solemn yew-tree.

Somehow he, least likely of all men to be superstitious, began to wish that

grave was not so near. She did not come back to him as he had seen her last, pale and beautifully still, but in all the wondrous glory of her first youth and loveliness. How pale and insipid seemed Marion's saintly *mignonne* face in comparison with the warm, glowing, passionate beauty stamped in unfading brilliancy on his heart. How colourless Marion's tawny hair, as memory brought back the blue-black lustre of his dead wife's heavy mantling tresses. How cold the sweet light of her large dark eyes, as he felt again the deep soul thrilling fire of Isabelle's midnight orbs. And then their voices, how utterly different—the one low-toned and winning, the other intoxicating in its wondrous weird melody. He seemed to hear again its low rich musical tones of love, and meet the accompanying starry brightness of those upturned

Orient eyes. Marion never told him how she loved; Marion's eyes never deepened when they met his. Cold, pure Marion! Love with her was a sweet refreshing cup of clear spring water, not a heart-burning draught of strong maddening wine. He had drunk of the wine till his soul sickened of its richness, and found the water strangely sweet to his jaded palate.

Both forms were equally perfect and equally tall, but Marion lacked the light subtle grace of the beautiful French girl. That dead woman's rivalry was as taunting, and comparison defying as though she stood before him in all her glorious perfection.

"What a romantic fool I am!" he said, angrily, throwing away the end of his cigar, and stepping out into the rain, which was falling very faintly now. Every step he

took he plunged deeply into the mud, so that it was with a feeling of great relief he spied old Foster afar off with the Hall carriage.

He did not feel in a mood to meet any one, so he chose a side corridor that led through the picture gallery up to his rooms. It was quite dark, as that part of the house was seldom frequented. As he was passing through the gallery he heard a low sobbing, and to his astonishment he saw Vivien, sitting in one of the big windows, looking a tiny forlorn speck in the sombre moonlight.

Some strange impulse led him to the child, unutterably grotesque as it seemed *that* man turning comforter; yet his voice was very soft as he bent down, resting one hand gently on the bowed golden head.

“What is it, my boy; why are you crying?”

“Oh! mamma, mamma,” sobbed the child. “Oh! my mamma, mamma.”

Clowden sat down, taking the tiny unresisting form in his arms; involuntarily he pressed it closely to him: so small, so helplessly appealing, and then that heartrending, exceeding bitter cry, “Oh! mamma, mamma.”

“My child, my darling,” he said, kissing him with sudden passionate tenderness, “mamma is better there.”

Atheist that he was, he believed that poor weary spirit was better “*there*.”

“In heaven?” Vivien said, hushing his sobs to an awed whisper, and raising his big, tearful, questioning eyes.

Lord Clowden shivered: he thought of the cold damp grave, over which the night wind blew so shrilly, but he said—

“Yes, darling, and all are happy there.” And somehow the hope for Isabelle’s present happiness seemed full of comfort for this atheist.

“Do you think she knows I want her so?” Vivien sobbed again. “Heaven is so far away—Oh, dear Jesus, take me to mamma, I want her so. Oh! mamma, mamma.”

Clowden Strafford, cold cynic that he was, felt a strange tightness round his heart, and his eyes were more than dim as he pressed his tiny son to his heart, and the poor little aching soul clung tenderly to him, finding comfort in the fond pressure of those firm strong arms.

Clowden felt utterly helpless—words of comfort died on his lips—so he let him sob unchecked, holding one wee icy hand in his own, and running the jewelled fingers

of his other hand gently through the soft fair curls, that clustered round them lovingly, fetterwise, to keep a father's hand there.

So they sat, and the gentle angel Sleep came to comfort the poor baby, and he slept in his father's arms; with the soft pale moon shining through the stained windows, flickering on the armour, lengthening the shadows on the pictures, but throwing a faint steady halo round those two—that hard battered cynic, and that fresh young life—all blank, till the patient future should turn, leaf by leaf, the volume of its existence.

Clowden sat quite still—he almost held his breath, not to disturb that gentle quiet sleep; and he watched with a new feeling of tender thoughtful love the tumbled golden head and fair pale face, thrown into pure relief in the holy moonlight.

The little lips were parted, and the even breath came and went, or else he thought that rest was strangely like death ; that little face, still pale with woe, strangely like that dead mother's, as she lay calm and fearfully still in the roadside inn. He bent down lower and lower, till his moustached lips rested gently on the fair smooth brow ; but, light as the kiss was, the child felt it in his dreams, and murmured fondly, " Mamma !"

Could that dead mother have seen them, would she have smiled gently, or would she have dashed them apart in bitter, unrelenting revenge ?

A quick light footfall fell on the stillness, and Clowden put Vivien down so hastily that he began to cry. It was Lady Evylin.

" Oh ! you naughty Vivien," she said,

bending down and kissing him ; “ we’ve been looking everywhere for you. Fancy your straying to this dark place ! We shall have to get a little chain for you, like Tiny’s. You dear, naughty little boy.”

Clowden had drawn into the shadow, but as Carrie’s clear voice died away in the distance he came back to the window-seat, and sat there far into the night—thinking !





CHAPTER VIII.

IT was Sunday, and the soft sunlight crept lazily through the dusty painted windows, slanting off the dark old pillars that lined the aisle, and lighting up the listening faces of the village congregation. Mr. Palmer, in the carved oak pulpit, was preaching from the 4th verse of the 21st chapter of the Revelation, and the solemn earnest words went home to many an honest toiling heart. They all liked Mr. Palmer's preaching; it was clear, concise, and to the point; he did not try to mystify simple truths by a volley of argument, and rarely used any eloquence

beyond that steady force of expression that must always proceed from a clear strong mind.

Vivien, in the sombre, velvet-hung Hall pew, listened with rapt large eyes, and Lady Evylin, guessing what was passing in the busy child-brain, put her arm kindly round him, and held him so. The big pew looked very empty : all the guests, excepting Lord Clowden, had left for the winter season. Honest Sir John, who generally indulged in a quiet little nap while the good man preached, to-day listened upright and attentive, and his kindly blue eyes grew just a little misty as he thought of the dear gentle wife, whose pure loving spirit had been called away some ten years back. Carrie looked very like her, as she sat, with her soft woman's face full of tender pity for the orphan child, and Sir John's

eyes dwelt very fondly on her. He looked, too, at that other fair child, who would go so shortly from them, and then at the man to whom he had trusted the happiness of his youngest darling.

Lord Clowden's arm leant on the carved pew-door, his head resting on his hand. He was thinking, but not of the sermon; the words of the preacher floated on his ear, but never reached his brain. He had been watching a piquant dimpled face, far down the aisle, till the blue eyes met his, and the little face flushed rosy red, and never looked up again all through the sermon. It was Sacrament Sunday, and he felt glad of it, because he would not have to walk home with Marion, who always stayed to the Communion; and he made up his mind to waylay that rosy little face, and find out why the blue eyes were so shy of his.

At last the sermon was over, and they all rose for the parting blessing. Very low Clowden bowed his head, but his eyes were still fixed on Lucy's face; and he left the church by a side door. Stepping across the green, quiet graves, he met her just as she was leaving the churchyard.

The childish face was sunny with pleasure as she greeted him. They did not talk much till they were all alone in the fast-fading, winding lanes. Then he said—

“Did you like the sermon, Miss Dashwood?”

“Yes, very much,” she answered. “Mr. Palmer always preaches nicely.”

“Is he one of your favourites?”

“Yes, I think so,” she said; “he is very good.”

“Don't you think him very pedantic, and absurd in his ideas, Miss Dashwood?”

“Oh !” said Lucy, looking up with shocked round eyes.

“Do you think you’ll go to heaven, Miss Dashwood?”

“I don’t know ; I hope so,” she said, uneasily wondering why he was talking so strangely.

“Is not this the proper kind of conversation for Sunday?” he said. “I want to be good to-day.”

If she had looked up, she would have seen that he was laughing ; but she walked on, looking down at the cross on her prayer-book, and said nothing.

“What opinion did you form of the sermon?” he said, after a few moments, watching her face with an amused smile.

“I did not form any,” she answered, quietly.

“But you listened very attentively.”

“Yes,” she said, still looking down.

“What were you thinking of all the time?” and he bent down, lifting the soft face between both his hands. “Lucy, what were you thinking of in church this morning—eh, darling?”

She raised her blue eyes, and the story was all told there, in the sudden wondering love-light.

“Of me, Lucy?” and he bent down till his lips lighted on hers and rested there.

“Yes,” said the girl, trying to hide her flushed face.

“Do you love me, little Lucy?”

“Yes,” she said, in the same low voice.

“How long have you cared for me?”

“Oh! ever so long,” she answered, looking up; and there were tears, bright, happy, glistening tears in the blue eyes.

“Poor little Lucy,” he said, “you’ve

loved me for ever so long, and I have only just began to care for you."

She looked up quickly to see if he was laughing at her, but the dark handsome face was very grave.

"Don't you care for me, Clowden?"—his name came so softly.

"Care for you, little darling! Yes, very much now ;" and he put his arm round her.

"Don't look so grave, Clowden;" and she put her hand up shyly to his face. "Wont you smile? Have I said anything to offend you?"

"You! Oh no, you little golden-haired pet; I was wondering what I had done that you should love me. I am not worth it, Lucy; not worth any woman's love."

"Yes, you are," she said, fondly, "and I could not take mine back if I wanted to."

“ I’ll believe you,” he said, with a pleased smile, “ if you’ll stand on tiptoe to kiss me.”

“ Oh ! Clowden, I could not,” she whispered, looking down shyly.

“ Then you don’t love me, little woman,” he said, laughing down at her.

“ Yes, I do ;” and she hid her little red face on his arm.

“ You need not hide your face, Miss Dashwood.”

She looked up anxiously. “ Are you cross ?”

“ What a funny little pussy it is ; she’s always fancying I am cross.”

There was a long pause. Lucy felt very happy resting on his arm, with the blue heaven-vault smiling above them both, and the soft wind playing with the falling leaves and whispering low love-tales among them.

Poor little Lucy, she was not very beautiful, or very graceful, or clever; but she was as fresh a flower as any to be found in the world's wide garden. A pure, guileless child, with no more knowledge of the sin and bitterness of life than a wee dimpled baby crowing in its mother's arms. Looking at her in those days, she seemed only made for happiness.

I never could fancy the blight of sorrow falling on Lucy Dashwood; I loved her very much then, and her future seemed so easy to read.

The kind shield of a strong man's arm, the fond sympathy of a good man's heart—this seemed to me our golden-haired pet's predestination; and I fancied in her small Utopia, the narrow boundary of her home, she would dwell happy and secure, till the Angel of Death bid her rise up and go.

No one had ever told her that deception lurked behind the fairest seeming. She loved because she loved, and never questioned why; and when Clowden told her that he loved her, she believed him implicitly. She had never read a novel in her life; she did not care for reading, to tell the truth. Her mother had died when she was a tiny thing; and her father, the days of his gipsyhood over long before Lucy could walk by his side, seemed to have forgotten that his child might ever need a caution. So, like a fair wild rose, Lucy was in danger of being plucked by the first passer-by.

“What would your father say if I ran away with his wee Lucy—eh, you small child?”

“Oh! papa,” she said, waking from her happy reverie, “dear old daddy! he would be glad to know that you loved me.”

“Lucy,” said Clowden, “would you like to please me?”

“I would do anything in the world to please you,” she answered, simply and earnestly.

“Well, Lucy, don’t tell your father about our love—yet.”

“Oh! why not, Clowden? It would please him so.”

“Promise me that you won’t. I have led a wild life, and he might not like your caring for me.”

“Oh! he is not like that,” she cried; “he would like any one I cared for; and you are going to be good now, Clowden.”

“I tell you not to tell him,” he said, with a sudden cold sternness in his face and manner.

“Please don’t be cross, Clowden; please

don't," she cried; "I'll do anything you wish."

"That's a good child," he said, smiling. "I wish I could keep you by me all day. It's two o'clock already, little one; aren't you hungry?"

"Oh! is it so late as that? I am afraid papa will be cross with me for staying out so long," said Lucy, picturing the peevish old Major waiting his dinner. He got into the habit of dining early for Lucy's companionship, when she was a small child, and still adhered to the good old practice.

"I shall be late for lunch, as usual," he laughed. "I am a sad idler, little Lucy. When shall I see my pet again? Will you come here to-morrow afternoon—eh, wee one?"

"Yes," she said, as she put up her face for a good-by kiss.

“Good-by, little darling,” he called out as she ran lightly down the lanes, stopping at last, breathless and happy, at the pretty cottage where she lived with her father, and Jane, the hard-faced but kind-hearted housekeeper, cook, parlour-maid, and every other household functionary combined in her fat person, for they kept no other servant





CHAPTER IX.

LUCY did not see Clowden the next day — it rained heavily. She spent most of the time with her soft fair face pressed against the rain-dimmed window, watching the little puddles to see if it had not *really* left off raining. She felt inclined to take an umbrella and defy the elements, only she doubted his equal partiality to a shower-bath *tête-à-tête*.

Silly little Lucy, as she thought of him, longing for his presence, this bad, worthless man seemed to her the very embodiment of all that was noble, glorious, and good. Oh ! if she only had some one to confide her

great joy to ; if she dared tell her father, she knew he would sympathise with her. How strange it seemed that Clowden should have wished her to keep silent.

As she turned from the window, and saw the dear old careworn face by the fire, she felt more than once as if she could keep her secret no longer, but must run up to him, and put her arms round him, and tell him all about it. Then warningly would rise before her the determined sternness of Clowden's manner when he bade her not to tell her father yet. She felt so sure he would like Clowden. Every one must worship her idol. And so, thinking of him, and by dint of hard fighting with her natural impetuosity, striving to keep the precious secret of their love, the day passed—the day she was to have seen him.

The next morning was beautifully fine,

but although Lucy went out, she failed to see Clowden. And so a whole week passed without her seeing him, and Sunday came again, and he was not in the Hall pew at church.

Poor little Lucy was very miserable about it. Perhaps he was ill. Or no, far more probably, he had repented telling her of his love, and had gone away, and she would never see him again. This seemed excellent "Job's comfort," and brought with it a woman's refuge—tears. She used her blue eyes very badly just then, weeping for this handsome, forgetful lover.

They were all very busy at the Hall, preparing for Marion's wedding, which was to take place very shortly now.

Sir John wished to have Marion all to himself for a little while before she left them for good; so he said, when they

talked of going to London for her trousseau, "Can't you prepare all your finery down here, Marie? If we go to London, I shan't be able to have you by me for a moment, what with the visitors and the shopping."

So it was arranged, and Madame Elise sent one of her "young ladies" down to the Hall to take Marion's pattern, and settle the important trousseau question.

Marion had always been Sir John's favourite child, and he dreaded the thought of parting with her. There did not seem to be much in common between them though, except their excessive appreciation of fine horseflesh. The greater part of Marion's childhood had been spent in the saddle, and Sir John—hard-riding, fox-hunting old squire that he was—felt boundless admiration and sympathy for the perfectly intrepid equestrian. She had

been known to take fences that many a man, and no mean rider, had gone round to avoid. The small white hand could be very firm, and sometimes, when guiding her horse straight at some obstacle it would fain have swerved from, there would come into her face a look of determination utterly foreign to its soft outline—a look that should have warned Clowden, if Marion was once roused, she might be very hard to deal with.

Many people who had heard of Miss Doolington's equestrian powers owned to being very much disappointed when they first saw her. That gentle-faced, elegant girl, the intrepid amazon whose fame rang through the county!

She looked as though she would be more at home in the drawing-room than foremost at the meet. The soft sweet face seemed

almost insipid compared to the dashing horsewoman they had pictured, and they could scarce credit all the stories they had heard of Miss Doolington's exceptional bravery. Yet no one who had ever seen how the pink lips could close, and the soft eyes light up, would have called her insipid. But this was so very rare that it was no wonder people gave her credit for less character than she really possessed.

Clowden had gone to London to make arrangements for his marriage, and he returned to the Hall more than a week after that memorable Sunday; memorable at least to Lucy, who had almost given up all hope of ever seeing him again, and she was returning to her old quiet life. All its simple pleasures, though, failed to please her now, and the way seemed very dark after that one grand glimpse of sunshine.

Lucy had been a small coquette at heart before she loved Clowden; not wilfully or maliciously so, but from thoughtless exuberance of spirits—playing with love as a child might trifle with a precious gem, unconscious of its value, and pleased with its beauty; so our Lucy had been very fond of flattery, and seeing that Mr. Palmer admired the little fair face Nature had blessed her with, she tried to please and annoy him in many little innocent ways. At first this had been pleasant pastime enough; but now, with real, true, deep love in her heart for Clowden, the mimic love no longer amused her. This was her first love, and with such pure young hearts as Lucy Dashwood's that means a great deal.

I doubt if we, any of us, forget our first love. The after-choice may have been

wiser—years may have proved it so; but still memory holds a fond, warm place in our sear, world-worn hearts for that first hand-clasp of love. Perhaps its very purity makes the memory so fondly cherished. We can look back upon ourselves untainted by a world we scarcely knew then, with our young, fresh, glad hearts full of tender, holy devotion, that then would have counted a world well lost for love.

“What fools we were then,” we say, in our sober middle age, as we open the faded yellow paper, and look at the soft, glossy curl placed so carefully there long ago—the reward of so many earnest prayers. Fools though we were then, there are times when we are just a little more world-weary than usual, when we could bow our head on that very curl, and weep such tears

for the vanished past as might well disgrace our portly debonair manhood. But our own heart alone knows that bitterness, and we come out of our chamber with a little more hauteur in our manner than usual, and our conversation just a little more cynical perhaps. Bitterly trying to hide and revenge the pain in our own heart, and no one to hear the light way we speak of women at our club in the evening, would guess that our morning had been spent in weeping over a woman's curl.

We are strange mixtures, all of us, and it would often be wise to judge our neighbour somewhat after this fashion: Is he so cold and cynical to hide a warm true heart? Or of another: Is he so affable and hearty because he has no heart? The answer would often be in the affirmative; and it is better so, for why should we go

about proclaiming our sorrows in the ears of a world, cold in its pity, and contemptuous in its sympathy.

Clowden had not forgotten Lucy, and the second day of his return he went out, hoping to meet her. He had not long to search. Sir John had had some timber felled on the outskirts of the Park, and sitting on a prone log, among the *débris*, Clowden found Lucy. There was something very suggestive in the little, bowed, listless figure, and his conscience smote him as he drew near; and had he obeyed the better promptings of his heart, he would have turned and left her unperceived. What right had he to trifle with this child's love, he who would so shortly be married to another woman? But the temptation was too great, and Clowden had never learnt how to resist temptation.

“ Lucy !” he said, gently.

She started up with one glad cry, threw herself into his arms ; it was happiness resting sobbing there, after that long weary while.

“ My Lucy, little darling, what is it ?” he said, pained and flattered at her emotion. “ Hush, my pet ;” and he sat down on the log, drawing her closely to him. “ What ! so sorry to see me ?” taking the wee wet hands from her face.

“ I am — am so — very — stupid,” she sobbed, drawing herself up and pushing her hair back with little trembling hands. “ I thought you had gone away for good, Clowden.”

“ Gone away for good ! You silly child, I had to go up to town on business. How could you doubt me so, Lucy ?”

She turned such a penitent face to him, saying, “ I am so stupid.”

“I went out that wet Monday to see you, but I suppose you forgot our appointment, Lucy.”

Fresh tears gathered in Lucy's blue eyes.

“Oh! if I had only known,” she cried.

“Come, Lucy,” he said, kissing the little forlorn face, “dry up your tears, child; I can't talk to a waterfall.”

After a certain pass, men get impatient of tears.

Very dutifully Lucy did as she was bid, but it was some little time before the blue eyes looked pretty again.

“What a little fright she has made herself,” he said, laughing; but his eyes drank eagerly in the pretty youthful face.

There was not much real beauty there; the dimpling, undulating mouth was too wide, the pretty eyes somewhat too small,

and the nose decidedly *retroussé*; in sober middle age Lucy would be comely enough perhaps, but retain no traces of her present prettiness; but now all defects of feature were amply made amends for, by the wonderful inimitable bloom of youth: the glowing, softly-tinted face standing bravely the searching test of day.

Talk of the richly-coloured Italian beauty, of the pale pretty girls of France, but show me in all the world anything so beautiful as the soft blush-rose complexion so many of our bonnie maidens possess.

Lucy's eyes were real blue, not pass-muster grey; and her glittering hair made up a fresh beautiful picture.

"See, Lucy, I did not forget you when I was in town," said Clowden, taking a ring from his pocket. It was a very pretty

design—two little hearts, one ruby and the other diamond, tied together by a diamond true-lover's knot.

“Will you promise never to take it off,” he said, putting it on the third finger of her left hand. “Promise, darling, to let no one but me have the power to take this off.”

“Oh! it is beautiful,” cried Lucy.

“Promise, my pet,” he said, detaining her hand.

“Oh yes, I promise, Clowden; *no one* (most emphatically) shall ever take this off but you.”

“Sweet little darling,” he said. “My own Lucy, you will never doubt me again, will you?”

“No, never again,” she said, resting her golden head on his shoulder; “never, never again.”

“I shall not be able to see you again for a long time, little Lucy,” he said, drawing the soft, beautiful flowing hair through his fingers; “but don’t you think the time would pass quicker if I were to write to you, and tell you when to expect me back again?”

“*Must* you go away?” And the blue eyes looked up anxiously.

“Yes, I must, my pet, or you may be sure I should stay.”

“Oh! Clowden,” and she clung sobbing to him.

“Now, Lucy, if you love me you must not be childish; I really must go. You have not told your father, have you?”

“Oh no,” she said, quickly. “May I tell him now?”

“Well, I don’t think it advisable yet. I shall send your letter to the post-office, Lucy; could you walk so far to get it?”

“To the post-office!” she said, wonderingly.

“Yes, don’t you see, child, if I address it to Miss Dashwood, you can go and ask for it, and no one but us two will know anything about it?”

Lucy wondered why no one was to know; she was too thoroughly candid and innocent to find excitement in the thought of secrecy.

“Will you call for my letter on the 12th of next month, Lucy?”

“The 12th of next month! Oh, Clowden, that is so long to wait!”

“But my letter is to tell you when I can return, and I shan’t know before then. So you see, Lucy, you can look forward first to my letter, and then to my return, pet.”

“On the 12th I must go to the town

and fetch it, instead of the postman bringing it to me," said Lucy; and her blue eyes looked up full of vague, childish wonder.

"Is that any very great hardship, Lucy?"

"So strange!" she answered.

"What a simple little goose you are," he said, impatiently. "Of course, if you don't want me to write, I won't do so."

Whereupon Lucy protested that she did want to hear from him; and so Clowden got his way about sending his letter to the post-office.

"You'll think of me every day, won't you, my own little one?"

"Every day, every hour, every moment in every hour," she said slowly, as though the words were too full of meaning to be said lightly.

“ Oh! Clowden,” she continued, winding her little soft fingers round his large brown hand, “ you’ll think of me—sometimes?”

It seemed rather a bold thing to have said, and she looked down, a soft beautiful glow colouring her face; it was very pretty, and he watched the blush die away before he answered.

“ Think of you, darling! of course I shall, and a little oftener than sometimes.” And then he added, after a short pause, “ Have you no little keepsake to give me, Lucy, in case I might forget?”

She raised a small bright dimpled face. “ Oh yes, I made you a little purse, but it’s so stupid, you wont care to have it.”

“ Oh yes, I shall indeed,” he said, eagerly; “ please give it me.”

“ I left it at home;” and there was a wee bit of coquetry in the saucy smile.

“Well,” he said, rising, “I’ll walk to the gate with you, and then you can fetch it.”

It was only a bit of knitted silk, badly made, and unevenly woven; but for many a long day Clowden prized it, in memory of the little soft hand that rested so lovingly in his.


“Good-by, my darling,” he said, tenderly; “precious little darling.”

They stood for one brief, blest moment, lip to lip, and hand in hand,—and so they parted.

Ay, Lucy! Cherish the memory of that kiss, for never again in all the circles of time may your lips meet his in such pure, happy, trusting love.



CHAPTER X.

T was undoubtedly very wrong of Clowden thus to trifle with Lucy ; but he was not the man to consider the possible consequences of his work, when that work was pleasant pastime. There were many girls of his acquaintance, carefully seasoned *débutantes*, who knew well how to manage an amusing flirtation ; who could thoroughly enjoy the pleasure of ball-room love passages, and seaside fooling, without their hearts suffering in the least ; girls who could be “ off with the old love and on with new,” till the day of their marriage ; and some of them, flirts from their cradle,

carried on this amusement even after they became matrons. To such natures, flattery and adulation are as essential to their lives as the sun is to the flowers; they drink it in eagerly, most of them innocently.

But Lucy, he felt instinctively, was cast in a very different mould; innocent, young, and untutored, she was but a child, at an age when many girls are old in the knowledge of love. This had been no flirtation to her; she had given Clowden her whole, pure, loving heart, and to love once, with her, meant to love always.

He liked her, in a selfish kind of way; the pretty childish face was very fair to look upon; and it was pleasant to see the blue eyes shine when they met his, pleasant to kiss the red mouth raised so lovingly, pleasant to feel that he held great power over this little golden-haired maiden.

When he was away, he would think of her in a self-complaisant, satisfied way ; she had loved him of her own free will ; he had not sought her love in any way, till he knew that it was his. So he would excuse himself ; and then, calling her to mind by some soft pet name, forget her for the time.

Clowden's marriage with Marion was a very grand affair, so the papers said next day. The bride young and lovely, the bridegroom exceptionally handsome, the friends numerous, and the toilets magnificent. A great contrast, in its pomp and show, to another quiet wedding you wot of, that took place six years ago in a small French chapel. Perhaps the grand dusk face did rise before him, as he saw it, gloriously beautiful, in the dull dawning of that eventful day when he made Isabelle

his wife. Perhaps the lofty-domed church did close round him, and in fancy he stood again within those narrow-painted, whitewashed walls, and saw the light from the mullioned window slanting on the tinselly altar-piece, with its gilt Virgin, grotesque saints, and large ivory crucifix ; on the white-robed priest, and on the bowed sweet face by his side. But his voice never trembled, his hand never shook, when he took Marion Doolington for better or for worse, till death should part them.

Clowden's nephew, the Duke of Hampshire, had offered to have the ancestral castle fitted up for his uncle's honeymoon ; but he preferred taking Marion to Seaton-glyn, a pretty place of his own in the north of England, where his mother was then staying ; and he had promised to bring Marion to see her, as she was too much

an invalid to have been present at his wedding.

Caroline Cavendish had been a famous Court beauty in her youth, and had made that great but sadly common mistake in life—an uncongenial marriage. She had taken to her husband a pure, proud, loving heart; and slowly and painfully it had been crushed and broken on the treadmill of his passions.

She knew that half the *demi-monde* might boast her husband's largess, and call him by his Christian name; and to a beautiful, high-bred, proud woman this had been very bitter. Many women would have had a public separation, and proclaimed his vices to the world; but she bore it all for Clowden's sake.

Caroline was the Duke's second wife; his eldest son (the late Duke) was a boy of

fifteen at the time of his father's marriage with Miss Cavendish. Of course he was no companion to the Duchess, who, ashamed of being pointed at as a neglected wife, shut herself up from society and devoted her time entirely to Clowden, whom she almost idolised—spoiling, humouring, and petting him in every possible way.

Three little children had been laid in the grave before his birth; and it was no wonder the poor lady lavished on him all the strong, perfect affection that had once been his father's—the only being who loved her and could sympathise with her in her many hours of humiliating loneliness.

The evening of their arrival at Seatonglyn Clowden drew a low chair to the side of his mother's sofa. Taking her soft thin hand in his, as he had done many times in childhood, he pressed it tenderly to his lips. In

his hard, battered heart this man had one sacred spot, where lay a great and deathless love for his mother.

It seems strange to me, if women are so fickle and changeable as they say, whence came those dear gentle mothers we can most of us, thank God, remember. Were *they* changeable, fickle, or frivolous? They come back to us often in our busy after-life—beautiful in their calm, staid, faded middle age. Though we laid her low, sorrowing sorely, long years back, shall we ever forget the gentle mouth, with the little lines round it, that tell how mother thought for us? Shall we ever forget, even in the shadow of death, the words of loving wisdom that fell from those now silent lips? Little things, small and insignificant in themselves—a trick of manner, a word, or smile—come back to us often, bringing

back the dear dead, full of loving, tender life.

“It is very pleasant, mother, to be with you again,” Clowden said.

She smiled fondly on him—this son, whose manhood, she thought, had fulfilled all her fondest hopes. She knew nothing of his sins; she saw him now, as she had always seen him, through a loving mist of trust.

Personally they were very much alike; only her mouth—that tell-tale feature—was much more gentle than his, and her eyes were long and prominent, while his were deeply set; there was something of the same haughty *nonchalance* in her carriage, too, that characterised Clowden.

“You have not yet complimented me on my wife,” he said, gaily. “Does she merit

your approval, *madre mia*? Look at her now."

Marion was sitting at the piano, singing, at the end of the long drawing-room; and her sweet voice fell low and subdued on their ears. The tall, graceful woman, with her soft profile and well-poised, ruddy head, was very fair to look upon.

"Yes, Clowden," his mother answered; "I am more than satisfied with your wife. You have chosen, as I knew you would, well and honourably. I was so pleased when I heard of your intended marriage; I had feared you would never find any one worthy of you, my good, noble son."

Clowden winced—*he noble!* What would his mother think of that first wronged wife whose very tombstone accused him, in its taunting alias; of the little unowned son who might never know a father's name—

never know a father's love? He felt it would be a great relief if he could confess the shameful secret to his mother; but he feared even she would scorn him.

Ah! this sin of concealment! He felt it would haunt him through life, and that he must carry it unconfessed to his grave. And then he thought, making a virtue of it, "Why should I trouble her with my sins? She has had trouble enough."

"You have been a good son, Clowden," his mother said, softly, smoothing his hair with tender, tremulous hands, and looking into his eyes with a great yearning, passionate love—"a dear good son; and you will be a good husband. I don't doubt you, darling, but I should like you to promise me that you will always love and cherish your fair young wife. Remember, Clowden, how your father blighted my whole existence,

and by that memory promise me you will be good to Marion."

"On my word, I promise, mother, if it will give you pleasure; but how could I behave badly to her, when I love her so?"

And he meant it—meant it as he sat, with his mother's hand in his, looking fondly at his wife.





CHAPTER XI.



VERY pretty picture of happy girlhood our Lucy made as she stood before the looking-glass in her own little room on that bright hopeful morning—the 12th day of the month—the looked-for day, when she might fetch Clowden's letter. She smiled a glad greeting at the little, rosy, dimpled face, and the soft blue eyes grew misty as she gazed, half shyly, at herself from under her drooping eyelids—grew misty with sudden luminous love-light. It was this vain little woman's one grand toilet secret that she plaited her hair up tightly every night, to make it wave in the day-time; and

she stood now, with busy white fingers, freeing the imprisoned tresses, and they, glad to escape, fell rippling and glittering, a sunny frame for a sunny face.

Lucy had thought a good deal of the expected letter. Would it be long or short? How would it begin? and when would he come back? All this had been pleasant food for many wasted hours of dreamy speculation; and now the day had at length arrived, when all these questions would be answered; so no wonder Lucy's face was very bright, and she sang a little impromptu refrain to the glad music of her happy heart, as she tied back her shining hair with a gay pink ribbon. She must have found great sympathy in the darling little mirrored face, for she looked at it very often. Ah! had she known, as she stood there a pretty, happy child, what that day

had in store for her ! But who would grudge her these few joyous, expectant hours—this one last dalliance in the pleasure-ground of youth ?

Later in the morning, a little wrapped-up figure went quickly through the village, across the fields, and on towards the town. It was very chilly, but Lucy never felt the cold, as her little feet went pit-a-pat over the frozen ground, and her silly little heart made fond melody of loving nonsense to Clowden. Once she stopped and drew off her warm glove to look at the two little glittering hearts, "Clowden's and hers," she would say to herself.

"I am sure he is thinking of me, because you sparkle so, you dear little things," she said, kissing the ring in childish admiration.

And perhaps her name did lie half *perdu* in his thoughts as he lazily drank the coffee

Marion had poured out for him, at their first *tête-à-tête* breakfast.

With the strange inconsistency that characterised him, he had written to Lucy on the eve of his wedding, and posted it the next morning on his way to church, so perhaps he did speculate on when she would get it. I wonder if the piteous, tearful cry, "You'll come back soon, Clowden," did mix accusingly with his wife's low-toned, pleasant gossip? I think not. We are seldom haunted by our wrongdoing unless we suffer in some way through it.

Major Dashwood had not noticed Lucy's ring. On her last birthday he had given her a small box of jewellery that had been her mother's, and had he thought about the ring at all, he would have supposed she found it there. He would never have thought of suspecting Lucy of anything

clandestine ; he looked upon her still as a child, warm-hearted, candid, and incapable of deception.

It was with a little flutter of nervous importance that Lucy left the post-office, holding the precious missive tightly in her hand. She peeped at the bold free writing on the envelope ; she examined the seal, but she did not open it till she was far on her way home. It ran thus :—

“LITTLE PET LUCY,

“ I find I shall not be able to see you before the 3rd of next month. On that day I will be found in the Mile-end Road, if a certain little woman cares to look for me. About half-past two o'clock would be the best time to begin your search. Bring a great many kisses with you, as I shall be sure to want some, and I hope you have

laid up a large store of them since I last saw you.

“It is very late, wee one—long past midnight, so my news must wait till we meet again.

“Good-by for the present, my own little Golden-hair. With much love, and two particularly sweet kisses,

“Believe me,

“Your ever loving

“CLOWDEN.”

That was all; but Lucy read it by the light of her loving heart, and the little, commonplace note was a wonderful missive in her eyes. It was her first love-letter, and she read it over and over again, dwelling fondly on each pet name it contained. Then she began to count the days to the 3rd, and so, walking fast, looking at

her letter, and thinking of Clowden, she seemed to reach home very quickly.

The Major was waiting dinner for her. Something in the sweet, glad young face touched him, for he drew her fondly to the side of his chair, saying—

“How happy and well you look, my dear. Ah! what a wonderful thing is youth!”

Lucy would have liked to show him her letter—that precious letter! She could hardly trust it out of her sight for a moment, and all dinner-time she kept putting her hand in her pocket to see if it was quite safe.

It was rather a silent meal. Lucy was too happy to talk, except on one subject, and that was forbidden. The Major watched the pretty, animated face, but no thought of any hidden cause for happiness crossed his

mind. He was feeling worried too ; he had just been looking over his bills, and they seemed startling in comparison with his slender purse, for the old Major was very poor. That demon “genteel poverty” haunted him—the bitter reward of a mis-spent youth. There seems to me nothing so pitiable as an old person worried for want of money ; to see the poor grey head, and aged, bent form, not going calmly and peaceably to the grave, but hurried cruelly in the mad whirlwind of mental anxiety ; to see the worn-out brain, that should be fast forgetting all earthly subjects, continually strained to meet the daily need and the morrow’s wants.

Lucy went to the piano after dinner, but somehow she did not feel inclined to play, or to read, or to do anything, in fact. The excitement had worn off, and she felt

quietly, dreamily happy. So she stood by the window, a little, soft, golden-haired, happy woman ; with a world of love in her heart, and a world of love shining from the blue depths of her glad eyes, a soft carmine glow on each rounded cheek, and a happy smile dividing the full lips ; one wee dimpled hand pushing back the red curtain, the other buried in the pocket of her grey dress holding fast the precious letter, looking a darling household pet, utterly unfit to face the pitiless stormy waves of sorrow.

“Oh ! papa,” she cried, “here’s Mr. Palmer ; I don’t want to see him ; there is no time for me to run away. Don’t say I’m here ; if I sit very quiet in the window he wont see me behind this curtain.”

Mr. Palmer looked round for Lucy, as he shook hands with Major Dashwood.

“I can’t stay,” he said. “I just came round with the *Times*; I thought perhaps Miss Lucy might like to read the account of Miss Doolington’s wedding.”

“Ah! thank you,” said the Major; “I daresay it will amuse my little girl. So Miss Doolington has married Lord Clowden Strafford! If he is anything like his father, it wont be a very happy match. I knew the Duke slightly, and was present at the time he met his death; the most notorious flirt in Europe—the most notorious flirt.” And the old Major shook his head after the manner of old people talking scandal.

“I never heard that Lord Clowden Strafford was a flirt,” said Mr. Palmer; “it is to be hoped he is not.”

“True, true,” said the Major; “but, as I said before, his father was. Why, it was simply to please a fair lady that he attended

the hunt the day he met his death. You see he was not well at the time, and he got up from a sick-bed to go. We all tried to persuade him not to go; but he had set his mind on the promised privilege of chaperoning the lady. Ah! it was a day to remember—such a run we had—such a game little fox! I can see him now, dodging the hounds, and we never got him after all, though they well deserved blood. A better pack I never saw, but that clever little fox did them! The master was rather down about it, but no one ever thought of blaming the scent. Well, about the Duke: you see he came to a pretty stiff fence; it might have been cleared easily though, but his hand was rather unsteady, and the mare swerving a little to the right, cannoned against another horse that was taking the fence at the same time; both riders were

thrown; the other man escaped almost unhurt, but the Duke was picked up stone dead."

"Oh! how very shocking," said Mr. Palmer; "was his wife there at the time?"

"Oh no! Ten years before his death he married Miss Cavendish, the belle of a good many seasons. I often saw her—a regal, beautiful woman: they say he behaved very badly to her. She was not with him at the time of his death; they seldom visited together."

"Lord Clowden was his second son?" said Mr. Palmer.

"Yes, his second son, by a second marriage; his first wife was Lady Rose Stewart. I never saw her. His eldest son died three years ago, and *his* son now wears the ducal coronet; the young man is engaged to the Hon. Lilian Campbell, so there is not much

chance of Lord Clowden ever taking the title."

Would they never stop talking about Clowden's family? thought the agonised girl behind the curtain. Their very voices pained her, and each word seemed to fall like lashes from burning wire, cutting her brain. She had not started, or called out, or fainted, when she heard that Clowden was married: beneath the bright, childish exterior there lay a strong, brave heart. She felt as one might, coming in, gay and wondrously happy, from some bright pleasure meeting, to be told suddenly that the one they loved best on earth was dead!

Can you fancy the horrible revulsion of feeling? She sat perfectly still; the light died from her eyes, the smile from her lips, and a strange, awful pallor crept over the set, drawn face. For a few moments she

was incapable even of thought; that they were talking, talking, talking, was all she knew. She even noticed, in a vague, wondering way, the difference in their voices—her father's sharp, thin tones, and Mr. Palmer's full, rounded, and rich. She felt so stiff and icily cold too, as though she could never move again.

Her father walked to the house-door with Mr. Palmer. Something, not herself, seemed to seize the opportunity, creep from her hiding-place, take the *Times*, and dash upstairs to her own room. She locked the door, and opened the paper mechanically. There it was—the long, taunting account of how the bride looked, what she wore, how many bridesmaids there were, &c. &c.

Lucy read it all, repeating it out loud like a child learning a lesson—repeated it,

her poor bewildered brain refusing to understand it. When she had finished she crossed over to the looking-glass, not from any wish to look at herself, but in a vague, helpless way. What a bitter mockery she saw there of the beauty that had greeted her in the morning!

The jaunty pink bow, the bright wavy hair!—ah! but the poor little haggard white face! It was too much, and Lucy covered her face with her hands, weeping bitterly, in pity, not for herself—she did not realise that yet—but for the forlorn, piteous, looking-glass face.

Then she read the paper again, through blinding teardrops; there was a horrible fascination about it, and by degrees the whole force of her misery dawned upon her—Clowden married, and to Miss Doolington! It was no hurried affair; the paper

said they had been engaged a whole year, waiting for Marion's coming of age.

Child as she was, Lucy had all a woman's instincts, and realised to the full the cruel shame Clowden had put upon her. She comprehended perfectly how contemptibly cheap he must have held her, before he could so debase her, even in thought, as to trifle with her love. That he had never loved her she knew now, never even respected her; and that he had been amusing himself at her expense was the most painful thought of all.

She did not hate him even in her deepest misery. Poor little Lucy was cast in no fierce, strong mould; she never thought of revenge—how could she, little helpless child! But a bitter, agonised cry went up from the prone, crushed figure to the listening, pitying Heavenly Father.

She lay on the hard floor, her aching head resting wearily against the bedside, feeling utterly crushed and broken—utterly unfit to grapple with her great grief, the sobs gradually subsiding from sheer exhaustion. If he had died, she would have stood by his side, tearful and sad for life, but finding resignation in the hope of a happy eternal reunion; but now to know that the man she had cared for so wholly and perfectly was unworthy of her love, unworthy of her respect, was too horrible, too painful!

She took out his letter; all the halo was gone now; she saw the abrupt, patronising, half-contemptuous tone; and yet that letter had made her perfectly happy but a few short hours since! She looked at it with hot, aching eyes, hating the sight of it, but feeling too utterly tired even to tear it

up. So she lay till the evening shadows fell.

There was a quick, startling knock at the door, and Jane's sharp voice calling—

“Tea is ready, Miss Lucy. Your pa's waiting.”

Very wearily Lucy rose, feeling cold, stiff, and heavily wretched. She would much rather have crept into bed, and sobbed herself unobserved to sleep; but she was learning that sad earthly lesson, that grief even must be hidden, and that life's small duties must be fulfilled as well as its large ones, even though our whole heart is crying out for luxury of lonely weeping.

Ay, little Lucy! poor wee, candid, untried child! You must do your daily work with a smile on your lips, while your aching, heavy heart is making its bitter moan which none but God and his pitying angels may hear.



CHAPTER XII.

LADY EVYLIN had a tiny residence in Park Lane, but Sir John, who hated town, persuaded her to return to Doolington Hall with him after Marion's wedding. It would have been rather a lonely life for her, now that her sister was gone, but for Vivien; the child was loving, bright, and full of spirits, and a great pet with the old Squire.

Sir John spent the greater part of the day in the saddle, and he was, when at home, shut up in his study a good deal, for he was a careful, good landlord, and gave great attention to the management of his

estate; and he had, moreover, a pet Bill he hoped to pass next Session, so Carrie saw very little of him in the daytime.

Marion had always accompanied her father in his rides, but Lady Evelylin was a timid horsewoman, and had not ridden for many years, so it seemed rather selfish of Sir John wishing to shut his daughter up in the lonely old country house; but he liked to have her fair face opposite him at meals, liked to have her sing and talk to him, in the long winter evenings.

Lady Evelylin's pony-carriage stopped very often at Major Dashwood's now, and a little pale-faced woman, with smooth braided golden hair, was always very glad to see her.

Lucy had a known cause for grief now. Her father—the poor old Major—lay stricken sorely in a darkened room, stricken

almost unto death. And Lucy, instead of being the bright little sunbeam of yore, was now staid and gentle, nursing the sick man with an anxious devotion that was painful to see in one so young. Her poor little face looked sadly wan and pathetic; the pretty hair no longer fell in sunny waves, but was wound simply round the small, shapely head; she never tied gay ribbons in it now, never since that day when her heart bowed in agony over its shattered idol. The blue eyes no longer shone their old clear, happy light, but were heavy and lustreless with lonely weeping and weary watching. Poor little Lucy was sadly unlike her former merry self. Lady Evylin, when she came, bringing hot-house fruits and choice dainties for the sick man, noticed, with the tender pity of one who has known sorrow, the sad change in the girl. And old Jane

would shake her head sadly, and say to herself—

“Dear heart, how poor Missy grieves for her father; please God to spare him, poor old gentleman!”

Lucy's grief at Clowden's cruelty was almost swallowed up in the haunting fear that her father would die. When she had gone from her room, nigh heartbroken at her lover's falseness, her one consoling thought had been that she had still her father to live for; and Fate, as though to mock her, had stricken him dangerously ill but a few days after.

“Oh! if he should die,” she would say to herself, as she sat watching the pallid, lined, suffering face. He had never seemed so dear as now, that dear old father! “Oh! God,” her whole soul would cry out in agony, “do not let him die; take me rather

—do not let him die ; you could not be so cruel. Oh ! he must not die.” That rebellious prayer was always in the poor child’s heart during those long terrible days. She would sit watching him by the hour, as though her yearning human eyes could keep back the soul that God had called.

As day by day the certainty of his death grew more and more on the minds of those round him, Lucy shut her eyes to the dreadful fact. She felt that he could not die, she wanted him so ; she would be all alone in the world, and to be alone had a terrible significance for Lucy. She could now, in her anxiety, keep the first grief at bay ; but if she lost him—lost both the false love, and the tried true affection that had brightened her whole life—what, indeed, would she have to live for ?

“You must go out more, little lady,” Dr. Blake would say. “Where are all the roses gone?”

So Lucy sometimes took sad little walks; and out in the air, away from the sick-room, she often thought very piteously of Clowden. The villagers meeting the sad-faced girl, would look after her with great sympathy in their honest hearts, for it was known to all that her father lay dying.

Lucy had made up her mind to see Clowden on the 3rd; in her weakness she thought she would like to see him once more—only once more, her heart pleaded; and after that she would bury this love for ever. It was a relief to her when the day came; that day would end all, and better so, she wearily thought. She would look on him once more—on the manly face, whose beauty she had so worshipped; she

would hear his voice, and touch his hand, and then the grave of her hope, her love—the grave of the past—would lie between them. She would turn that page of her life down, and never lift it again.

She went into her father's room before going out ; he was looking a little better, she thought, and she told him so.

“Please God, little one,” he answered ; “but I am afraid the poor old man will never be better again.”

He was getting very gentle ; the old peevish way was disappearing rapidly.

“Oh ! darling, don't say so,” she cried, throwing her arms round him as though to hold him back from what she so feared, a great horror in her eyes, and the heavy, dreadful fear rising in her heart.

“Poor little Lucy, dear little child !” he said, tenderly ; “it will be hard to leave

you, and to leave you unprovided for. Mr. Palmer was speaking to me about you the other day, Lucy—a very nice young man, my dear. He will take care of you when I am gone—eh, Lucy?”

But Lucy did not heed what he said; she was sobbing bitterly, rebelliously, her piteous agonised face hidden on her hand.

“Oh, father, I can’t bear it!” she cried; “it will break my heart. It is too cruel. Ah! why can’t I die?”

“My dear child,” he said, startled at her wild sobbing and bitter words, “you will make yourself ill; go out now, my pet, and we will talk afterwards; I have a great deal to say to you; and,” he added, in a lower tone, “and little time to say it in, perhaps.”

“I wont ever go out again; I’ll stay here and die!” she cried.

“Lucy,” he said, gently, “you are making me feel ill ;” and he leant back wearily.

She sprang to her feet.

“Let me stay. I will be so quiet.”

She had forgotten Clowden for the time ; everything but the dear old father she so feared losing.

“No, my child, you had better go out ; I wish you to go out,” with a dash of his old manner.

Lucy stooped down and kissed him fondly, bravely hushing her sobs. The habit of obedience was very strong, and she had always done as her father bid her, when he spoke determinedly.

“God bless you, my child !” he said, holding her face in both his hands ; “God for ever bless you, my darling !”

For many a long year that blessing came

back, full of tender mournful comfort to Lucy's heart. She gave him one lingering, loving look, and so, looking back, went out.

Clowden was there when she reached the trysting-place ; he was walking impatiently up and down, smoking a cigar. He threw it away as he came to meet her, saying, " Well, you have kept me long enough ! Why, what's the matter, child ? What, in the name of goodness, *have* you been doing ? Where is all your hair gone to ? "

" I can't stay," she said ; " papa is very ill. Will you take this off, please ? " holding out the little ringed finger.

" Are you in love with some one else ? " he said, standing erect, and looking down on the pale, trembling girl.

" No," she answered.

" Well, then, come to me when you are ;

then I will take it off—not before. But what is the matter, Lucy?”

The kind, tender tone in which he said the last words was too much for her. She had gone there meaning to say a last farewell to him, and give him back his ring; she had not meant to let him see how sorely she had felt his treachery; but now, when he spoke to her gently and lovingly, her poor little yearning heart cried out, and she hid her face in her hands, sobbing—

“How could you!—oh, how could you!”

“How could I do what, child? What is it I have done?” he said, bending down and putting his arm round her.

For a few brief moments she lay sobbing there, she felt so weak, worn out, and ill; those weary vigils and lonely hours of grief were fast telling on the child, and she lay

for awhile weeping in his arms, feeling a blessed sense of rest, as though she could sob her life out there.

After all, Lucy was not, perhaps, much to blame. She had had no mother to tutor her, she had never learnt her lesson in the school of propriety ; she was as ignorant as the most untaught heathen, as far as regards that gentle, constant, moral training which only a woman can give. In all she did, she simply obeyed the impulses of her pure young heart.

“ Hush, my love !” he said, kissing the little hands that hid her face.

That kiss brought back the bitter memory of his deceit. She drew herself up, pushing his arm from her.

“ You are married !” she said.

“ What if I am !” he said, defiantly ; “ I was engaged to Marion before I knew you ;

you never asked me to break off my engagement."

"You did not tell me that you were engaged," she said, in a low, hoarse whisper.

It was true, then! She had almost hoped he might deny it—that it was all a mistake about his being married.

"I thought you knew," he said, coarsely; "it was the talk of the whole place, and I thought, as you avoided the subject, you wished me to do so too."

It was a cruel, brutal blow, and the poor child reeled under it. This man had seen his first wife go from him, friendless and alone. Could Lucy Dashwood expect more pity than was given to Isabelle Strafford?

"Ah! did you think me as bad as that?" she moaned; and her face grew white—whiter even than it had been before. "So

bad as that!" And she rocked herself backwards and forwards as if in pain.

He stood watching her, and by degrees his hard face softened, and a faint pity entered his heart.

"My dear little Lucy," he said, "you don't understand. How can the fact of my marriage interfere with us? Does it trammel our love? Because I went through the marriage service with Marion, must I leave off caring for my little pet? Come, Lucy, be reasonable. Let us make up and be friends again."

"Good-by," she said, holding out a little trembling hand. "May God forgive you for your unkindness to me."

"And do you really mean to let this slight barrier, reared by a man in a priest's gown, stand between us?" he said, impatiently.

There was a look of piteous agony in the white face. He could see that the interview was too much for her—that it had better end; but still he never thought of sparing her. He was a cruel, brutal man by nature when his will was opposed in any way; and education had failed to remove the old leaven. All the advantages of wealth, high birth, and good society had only given this man a dazzling *surface* polish. Of course he was not all bad. There were times when his better angel was in the ascendant, and at such times he bitterly regretted the wrongs his fierce passions prompted him to commit.

“I had not thought, Lucy, that rigid propriety and you got on very well together.”

She put up her hand with a low cry; the harsh sophistry of his words pained her.

“Hush!” she said; “you told me before what you thought of me. Oh, it is too dreadful—too dreadful!”

“Lucy,” he said, taking both her hands and holding them lightly but firmly, “I thought you a darling, lovable, loving little pet. Say, my own little Lucy, was I wrong? Do you no longer love me, darling?”

“You are married!” she said, looking down. She could not trust herself to look up then.

“Is that your only answer? Think, Lucy;” and involuntarily the man’s passion found vent in a tighter, firmer clasp of the little trembling hands he held.

“I don’t want to think a moment about such a thing,” she said, raising her eyes with a gleam of blue fire in them; “that is

my only answer. You have insulted me enough."

He flung her from him, and strode heavily away, breaking the frozen ground under his angry, impatient feet.

An hour later Mr. Palmer, seeking Lucy, found her, lying prone where Clowden left her, sobbing bitterly.

"My dear," he said, bending anxiously over her, "don't take it to heart so. I thought I should have been the first to tell you."

"What do you mean?" she cried, springing up and grasping his arm with nervous force.

There was such a wild look in her eyes, that he thought she was going mad.

"Try and compose yourself, my darling," he said (involuntarily using the loving word

in his great sympathy). “It is the Lord’s will; and he died very peacefully, telling me to——”

“Oh, Heaven! papa is dead!” And she cried out loud in bitter agony—a cry so full of horror that it haunted him for many a day—and then a blessed sense of oblivion came, a brief, happy respite from pain. Lucy had fainted in Mathew Palmer’s arms.





CHAPTER XIII.



WO years have passed, bringing many changes to those whose fortunes we have thus far followed.

Lord and Lady Clowden are abroad, staying nowhere for any length of time, but travelling about from place to place as the fancy of the moment takes them. Of their marriage has been born one son—a fair, blue-eyed baby boy: D’Arcy Cavendish Strafford he was christened.

After this child’s birth, Clowden felt a great yearning for that other son—strange as it may seem of such a man, who had trampled down the most sacred ties of life.

The "might have been" would haunt him. He was as fond as he could well be of the pretty helpless baby; but often he would find himself thinking of Vivien's bright, bold face, and clear, ringing laughter; and it seemed as though that child would have gladdened his life greatly.

He was happy enough too. Marion and he got on very well together; she had none of Isabelle's quick, jealous instincts, and her calm nature was always satisfied with the love Clowden chose to give; if he waxed cold she never troubled him about it, and when he grew fond again he found her unaltered—pleasant, affectionate, and companionable always, not prone to take offence, and never giving it.

He was proud, too, of the stir she made among the foreign Courts. English beauty is always at a premium abroad; and

Marion's pure, fair face looked very flower-like among the cosmetised Parisians, swart Neapolitans, and glowing Spanish signoritas.

The men were all wild about her; but not the boldest and most conceited of her admirers would have dared to hope for any encouragement from the cold, graceful lady; and the gentle dignity of her manner left no room for any attempt at flirtation. Perhaps she was all the more popular for that, and it told well for Lady Clowden Strafford that the women equally admired her.

Clowden seemed to have grown good under his wife's influence, and had not been known to indulge in a single flirtation since his marriage. So the pair were fairly happy in a quiet, undemonstrative way; and I doubt if Clowden would have got on equally well, for so long a time, with any

living woman as he did with his calm, unexacting wife.

But still he did long strangely for his eldest son; and he felt almost jealous of the love that was lavished on little D'Arcy, while his first-born was isolated, brought up by charity, because he lacked the moral courage to face scandal and own him. At times he even thought of telling Marion, but when he tried he dared not. The gulf that had been between them during the days of his courtship was there still; he did not yet understand Marion, but instinctively he felt that to lower himself in her estimation would be to lose her love for ever.

Two years of wedded life had not destroyed one iota of Clowden's reverence for the woman he married. Marion was so unobtrusively good, that it was no wonder her pure life and conversation had great in-

fluence over the man who was always with her.

There was no fanaticism, or the slightest tinge of romantic sadness, in her religion. She did not try by words to convert him ; but he watched her earnest, devout worship in church—how morning and night she knelt long, silently praying ; and Clowden, who had not bent a knee to his Maker for many a long year, felt, though no words passed between them on the subject, how different, as light from darkness, Marion and he were.

He could not tell what was hidden under the calm, constant surface, so he might well be pardoned for looking upon his wife as a sinless saint. But I think Marion's religion was more the result of careful moral training than any real spiritual conviction ; that proverb of wise old Solomon held good in

her case—"Train up the child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it;" and Marion had been brought up in a God-fearing home.

I fancy if she had possessed the real spirit of the great Master she would have been more pitying, more forgiving, when her trial came. Too calm and too carefully tutored ever to be tempted to any great sin, too conscious of her own purity to be tolerant to evil in others, Marion—though Clowden did not even guess it—was a wee bit pharisaical. She was no hypocrite, though; up to her light she lived to the very letter.

But even from a worldly passionate woman, could he have hoped for easy forgiveness? He had asked her to marry him while his first wife was living, and it was a simple chance of fate that she died before they were united; and had she lived, what

would Marion Doolington have been? No, he felt that Marion could not forgive; and if he told her, there would be a public separation. He loved his wife, he loved his good name among his fellows, and the fear of the terrible consequence, should he own Vivien, held him tongue-tied. Surely there was bitter retribution even in this. The son who might have loved him, would be a stranger to him for evermore, and that son, like most things we cannot enjoy, seemed dearer far than little blue-eyed D'Arcy. He feigned an interest in Carrie's letters, only to hear of his boy—bright, loving eulogies on his personal beauty and winning disposition; little anecdotes of his madcap tricks, and bold merry ways. "He is so high-spirited," wrote Lady Evylin, "and I feel greatly the responsibility of bringing up this dear fatherless

boy." Fatherless ! That father felt it very bitterly as he read.

At Doolington Hall the two years had not passed without change. There was another inmate there now—our poor little friend Lucy Dashwood. After she had been carried home in Mathew Palmer's strong arms, on that sad dreadful day—carried home across the threshold where death had so lately passed—she had lain for a long weary while, ill both in body and soul. The spring flowers were blooming on the old Major's grave when his little daughter could move about again, a pale, sad shadow of the Lucy of yore—weary, oh ! so weary of life—a child in years, but old in her bitter knowledge of sorrow. She had shut herself up, allowing no one to see her but Lady Evylin and Mr. Palmer. The poor fellow was deeply

grieved to see how Lucy took this sorrow to heart; but he felt instinctively that any offer of love would be an intrusion on her great woe; so he contented himself by gently sympathising with her, and bringing good books and fair flowers; not but Lucy had plenty, of flowers, but it seemed all he could do, and his great honest love found vent in these simple attentions.

“Can’t you get Miss Dashwood to come and stay here awhile?” old Sir John said; “the change may do her good; the poor little thing is moping herself to death.”

So gentle Lady Evelylin took the girl from her desolate home, up to the big, dreary-looking Hall; dreary outside, but full of home-like brightness within. Little ruddy-faced Vivien and she were soon very great friends, and after awhile it was understood that Lucy would return no more to the

cottage, but live at the Hall. Carrie grew very fond of her, and in the happy quiet life she led there, she gradually became almost herself again. The pretty colour returned to her face, the light to her blue eyes, and her clear laugh rang out gaily and often; she could never be quite the same light-hearted Lucy of old, but she was happier than she had ever expected to be again.

She did not know what there was about Vivien so strangely familiar, what it was that fascinated her so in the child; something in the bold, black eyes; something in the proud set mouth, but she could not tell what. There was something she knew, strangely well too, in the tone of loving tyranny the boy adopted towards her, finding out, with the unerring instinct of childhood, how dearly Lucy loved him; she

was his slave, and the tiny despot repayed her with the devotion of his fresh young heart.

Lucy would have been perfectly happy but for the sad heart-ache that Time, the great healer, she felt could never cure, so many trifling things were constantly reopening the wound.

One day Lady Evylin was sitting reading under the shady Park trees, and Lucy, who had been playing at "runaway horses" with Vivien, threw herself down on the grass at her feet, saying—

"Now, Vivien, you must let your steed rest a little, you know."

She looked pretty and flushed, with her tumbled golden hair and blue eyes dancing with exercise. Carrie watched the two rosy faces, as Vivien, throwing his little arms round Lucy, kissed her.

“Why, Vivien,” she said, laughing, “if you love Lucy so, I shall be jealous.”

“Mamma,” he said, going up to her, “what does it mean, to be jealous?”

“Oh! you funny little boy,” she answered, patting the earnest sunburnt face; “perhaps Lucy can tell you.”

“Pain, bitter pain, at finding those you love, like some one else better than you,” Lucy said, so sharply that Carrie looked at her; but the poor little face was turned away, that she might not see its sudden agony.

Was she right? She had never envied, in the common acceptation of the word, never blamed, nor disliked Marion, but the bitter, fearful heart-ache she had done battle with could never be wholly conquered.

Poor Lucy lived altogether in the present; every thought of the past was

swallowed up in pain ; and of the future—well, she supposed she would grow old, and then—she hoped God would take her to heaven. There was no earthly future for little Lucy ; she had no real religion to rest upon, and could only find momentary happiness by throwing herself into the pleasures of the hour.

I have often wondered if the beasts of the field, who have only enough sense to enjoy the present, without thought or care, are not happier than we are, with all our marvellous powers of thought, speech, reasoning, and invention ; our knowledge of the past, and our hopes for the future ; our wonderful will, stronger if we choose to exert it, than our fiercest passions ; our nature so sensitive as to feel a cruel word as painfully as a blow ; so capable of love, devotion, heroism, and all that lends beauty

and attraction to this mysterious life. [How annoyed some of our Epicureans would be to have their chances of happiness wagered against the bliss of a placidly ruminating cow!]

And yet, if our creed was *utter annihilation*, how fearfully would the loss of time oppress us; how madly would we seize the present; and, when sickness or sorrow came, how multiplied would be its agony! That we were losing life—the precious life—that we could never enjoy again; that once spilt, would sink into the ground of oblivion, and be lost for evermore! We should have nothing to strengthen us in adversity, nothing to moderate our prosperity, nothing to keep us from crime. We should have had to be less endowed with God-given mental power, less endowed with every pleasant apprecia-

tion of life, to have borne the heavy burden of such a creed. With what bold unerring wisdom this fact points to a God. Atheists even must own that those grand gifts, man enjoys above all the animal creation, were given for a higher end, than the mere beautifying of this short span of life.

Lady Evelylin took Lucy to her town house for the season ; she went more into society for her sake, but somehow Lucy could not enjoy a ball now ; the memory of that " first ball," when she had danced with Clowden, would haunt her ; and she seemed to weary strangely of her partners, try as they would to amuse her ; she even felt less *ennui* when spending a perfectly quiet evening at home than in the midst of some gay revel.

" What a strange child you are, Lucy," Lady Evelylin said ; " when I was your age,

I used to get quite excited at the thought of going out."

"It is very nice dancing with some one you like," Lucy said, with a slight sigh.

"Why, you are quite a little flirt!" Carrie cried, smiling at the girl, who was growing daily paler now there was no teasing Vivien to make her run about in the open air, and keep her from thinking by his merry childish prattle.

Lady Evylin had noticed Lucy look weary often of late, and thought that she must take her home again, as London did not seem to agree with her. She did not know the sad canker that was eating away all the brightness of this girl's life; but Lucy herself knew that none but Clowden could ever fill the aching void in her heart. She did not encourage this love—it needed no encouragement, it had become part of

her very life ; yet it was rather the fond remembrance we should give to one who had died than the love of a living woman for a living man. When his name even was mentioned, unconsciously she would listen with a sudden hush of pleasure, as we might hold our breath to hear some sweet murmur of music—some old, but not forgotten melody, that comes back laden with the memory of the past ; and yet she herself scarcely realised how thoroughly engrossing this love was.

While in London, a little event happened to Lucy : there was a certain Colonel Crichton, a frequent visitor at Lady Evylin's, and Lucy soon struck up a great friendship with the grey old warrior, chiefly on the ground that he had served in the same campaign as her father. Lucy was very fond of hearing him talk of “dashing

Dick Dashwood :” it was pleasant to be told that that dear old careworn father had once been a gay young man of fashion, the best whip about town, the most elegant ball-room acquisition, a brave soldier, and a true friend.

Lucy grew to look for Colonel Crichton’s upright military figure, clear-cut face, and heavy grey moustache, always welcoming him with a glad smile ; yet she was very much surprised when she, one morning late in the season, received a stiffly-written, precise note, in which the colonel made her an offer of himself and all his worldly possessions ! Very gently Lucy refused it, telling him she never meant to marry. He was sixty, and she nineteen. I don’t think she thought of that, but he did, for she never saw him again. The weather-beaten old militant, who had come bravely out of

many a hard-fought skirmish in the far West, had not courage to face the little fair-haired maiden, who had taught him the bitter lesson that age is not the time for love ; kindly as the wound had been given, it nevertheless stung deeply.

Ay, when our brows are lined and our beards are grey, we must step aside, and let a younger wooer win and wear the fair rose-wreath of woman's love. We had our turn in the bygone days—the bygone days that went all too swiftly, leaving us none the richer, save for a few withered leaves of memory ; and yet, is there one living as fair as the beautiful face we have cherished so fondly in our soul's picture-gallery ? Are there any eyes as bright as those that beamed so kindly on us long ago, and then closed for ever, before time had dimmed their sweetness ?



CHAPTER XIV.

THERE was a goodly muster-
ing of guests at Doolington
Hall, the fourth autumn of
Lucy's stay there; and
among them came our old friend Fortescue
Browne, now happily married to bright
little Rose Fleming. To be sure, their
income was very minute, and their esta-
blishment conducted on the tiniest scale;
but they both seemed so thoroughly con-
tented, that even those who had shaken
their heads sadly over the improvident
match were obliged to own that it was not
so bad after all.

It was whispered, too, that Julien Lever-

son, having turned out a sad detrimental, Miss Hastings somewhat regretted her bad treatment of that young officer; be that as it may, no one ever had any real ground for saying so, and if she still felt any affection for the man she had trifled with, he never knew it—it went a secret to the coffin that bore her maiden name; and if in the end it be found that Maud Hastings coquetted away her heart's happiness, rest assured she wont stand alone. There are many women who, for the sheer caprice of the moment, have broken true, loyal hearts, and doomed themselves to lifelong repentance.

There is scarcely anything so pathetic as those sad words, "What might have been," unveiling, as they do, the dear, softly tinted, fanciful pictures we hung so joyously in the gallery of Hope. We hung them there in the glad buoyancy of our youth, maybe,

when the volume of life seemed written in rainbow letters ; or perhaps later on, when our heart, outwardly hardened by worldly cynicism, clung all the more fondly to its ideal future. We have proved that future when we wail, "What might have been," and found it different—oh ! so different—from what we had thought. We have toiled for it, we have prayed for it, we have waited for it, and the fair fruit turns to bitter ashes of disappointment in our eager hands. Those sad words appeal mightily to us all, stirring the phantoms of the past—the keynote to many a dreary heart-ache. Those poor ghosts we thought were laid for ever, rise up, a piteous mockery of the beauty we loved them for. What might have been—ay, what might have been, if——

And it is well for us when the "if" brings no self-reproach.

Life was very bright at Doolington Hall, with its out-door sport and in-door fun, but although the host was as genial as ever, many had noticed that he seemed bowed and aged since they last met beneath his roof; the truth was, the old Squire missed his youngest child; they had understood each other so thoroughly, and been such perfect companions in a quiet, unobtrusive way, that it was no wonder he felt her loss greatly. He would not mar her happiness by saying in any of his letters how he missed her, but Marion did full justice to his kind consideration, and longed equally to see him again. Clowden, finding out, quite by chance, how homesick his wife was, had proposed their returning to England, so Sir John looked forward to seeing them early in the summer.

To tell the truth, Clowden rather wished

to return home. He was tired of travelling, and he wanted to see Vivien. The Squire's letters to Marion had been full of the child of late, and naturally all this written praise warmed his father's heart; and he would have returned to England before the autumn, but his mother was staying at Nice, and her health being so very delicate, he did not like to leave her. It needed no doctor to tell him on what a frail thread her life hung; he could see it in the pale, haggard, still beautiful face; for Caroline was one of those women whom age even cannot really disfigure—in the dull apathy of her large eyes, and the weary listlessness of her manner; and he knew that, much as he loved Marion, she could never quite fill his mother's place in his heart. He felt it was his duty as much as his inclination to stay with her; and he liked his

wife all the more for her gentle loving care of the invalid. The duchess possessed a refined, highly-stored mind, and great intellectual powers of conversation; so Marion felt it was rather a pleasure and a privilege to be with her than an irksome duty.

All these years, Mathew Palmer had still loved Lucy; but, somehow or other, he had not yet found courage to tell her so. Lucy always seemed glad to see him, but there was a quiet, staid reserve about her, which checked the words that trembled so often on his lips.

She had changed very much since her father's death; that was natural, he told himself; all the glad, childish vivacity and impetuosity had gone from her manner; but the quiet, gentle little woman was very winning, and when the dimples did come,

they were all the more beautiful because they surprised you. Mr. Palmer would often find himself building bright air-castles, and little Lucy was the precious treasure those castles held. He would picture a snug little vicarage to shrine his darling; and the poor fellow fancied with blue-eyed, soft-voiced Lucy by his side nothing on earth could pain him; above all the women he had ever seen, she stood pre-eminent, a beautiful pearl of great price.

Part of his dream had come true; he had lately been presented with a very good living, that great step towards possessing Lucy; and as he would have to leave the village soon, he made up his mind to formally propose to her. He found it rather difficult to see Lucy alone, now that the house was full from top to bottom with

guests ; so he looked forward eagerly to the meeting of the hounds, because he fancied he would be able to see her alone on that morning. The men, he knew, would be out of the way, and most of the ladies, for there was many an intrepid Amazon among them, both maid and matron, who never turned shy at ditch or fence.

It turned out a pouring wet day, so that the ladies had stayed at home, and some of them were playing battledore and shuttlecock in the vestibule with Vivien, and two young men who preferred the ladies' society to taking their chance in the deluge outside. They had promised themselves a good laugh at the dripping sportsmen, when they returned cursing the weather and the bad scent.

“They'll never tally a fox this weather,” one of them was saying as Mr. Palmer

entered; "Reynard has too much regard for his brush to show to-day."

A glance told the curate that Lucy was not among them; there was a pretty little chamber off the breakfast-room, where he had often seen her; so, after shaking hands with the ladies, he went there hoping to find her. It was empty; and he was just turning away, feeling sadly disappointed—he had looked forward so to the day—when he heard a slight flutter of trailing robes, and Lucy stood before him, looking very gentle and pure in the quiet dark colours she always wore now.

"I daresay you are surprised at seeing me to-day," he said, "but I came on purpose to see you."

Lucy looked down; with a woman's instinct she knew and dreaded what was coming.

“I thought I should find you here,” he continued. “I want to talk to you, Lucy; may I?” As he spoke he led her to a sofa, and sat down by her side.

For a few moments there was a great silence; he watched her as she sat, small, fair, and winning, with her little hands folded demurely in her lap, and her soft eyes bent on the glittering ring Clowden had given her. Presently he said—

“You know I have been presented with a living, and I shall have to leave here very shortly now.”

“We shall miss you very much,” she answered, without looking up; and the thought of losing this tried friend lent a soft sadness to her voice.

He felt very big beside her, and a tender feeling of loving protection made him almost unconsciously put his arm round her.

“Lucy, my own darling, will you be my wife?” And he bent down, kissing the little soft pink ear, murmuring as he did so, “I do love you, little darling.”

“Hush!” she said, drawing herself away from him. “I can never be any one’s wife.”

“Why not?” he asked; and his honest brown eyes looked full and anxiously into hers. “Don’t you care for me? Your poor father, only a few moments before he died, told me it would make him happy to see you my wife. Don’t you care for me at all, dear?”

“I like you very much,” she said, the blue eyes filling with tears, “and I know poor dear papa did too, but——” And Lucy covered her face, sobbing bitterly.

“But, darling?” he said, bending anxiously over her. “Don’t cry, my own Lucy. I have loved you so long, dear; tell

me why you wont have me, and I'll go away, and not tease you any more. Don't cry, darling."

"I do like you," she sobbed, "but I don't love you; and besides," she added, raising her tearful eyes, "I promised never to take this ring off, and it's on the wedding-ring finger." Lucy tried to smile, but the smile was more piteous than any tears.

"Promised never to take that off," he said, looking at the ring in astonishment. "Who did you promise, Lucy?—not your father?"

"Oh! no; not papa," she answered.

He sat looking at her, and by degrees a faint suspicion entered his heart.

"Lucy," he said, "did a man put that ring on?"

"Yes," she said, in a low voice.

“And you loved him, Lucy?”

Loved him! The sudden upturned flashing of her blue eyes was answer enough, without the half-whispered—

“Yes.”

“And you still love him, Lucy?”

She did not speak, but the quick locking of her small hands was his answer.

“And is he coming to take that ring off, Lucy? Is he coming to marry you?”

“He can never marry me,” she cried.

“Is he dead? Oh! my poor Lucy.” And Mathew’s eyes glistened with sympathy.

“Oh! no,” she wailed; “not dead. But he can never marry me; he is married already.”

He looked at her for a moment in silent horror. This girl, whose whole life he thought he knew—this girl he had held pure as one of God’s angels—the woman

he had hoped to make his wife—in love with a married man !

It was too great a shock. He rose up, but the sight of the little, bowed, sobbing figure touched his heart.

“Oh ! Lucy,” he cried, “forget this folly; it is sinful. How dare you wear that ring !”

He took her hand, trying to take the ring off with unconscious force ; but the little soft fingers closed bravely round it.

“Oh ! don’t,” she cried. “It is all I have—all I have in the world, now papa’s gone and *he’s* married. Oh ! don’t; please don’t.”

He let her hand go sharply, and stood over the weeping girl, broad-shouldered and erect—a young, stern, untried judge.

“Lucy,” he said, “this is too horrible !” And without another word he turned and left her.



CHAPTER XV.



FEW days later Mathew Palmer left the village, and when he came to say good-by at the Hall, Lucy was not among those who shook him by the hand ; but from an upper window she watched him go, feeling very heart-sore and weary. He had seen her father die ; he had known her before the great sorrow of her life came ; he had been so kind and patient with her, so unobtrusive in his love, so gentle in his sympathy, that it was no wonder the tears dimmed her eyes, at the thought that she might never see him again.

He had left her in anger, thinking her worse even than she was; and to lose his esteem was bitter enough, but the words of blame, wrung from his honest heart's agony, found an echo in Lucy's soul. And yet, what could she do? The plague-spot of this unholy love had covered her whole heart; she had fought hard against it, and when she fancied she had gained some ground, it rose again like a giant refreshed, to mock her.

This strong, mighty love! She had prayed for strength to conquer it, and strength *had come*, when she most needed it. But, perhaps, the great Father saw fit to try Lucy by this very love, and he left her to fight the battle, as we have all to fight against temptation; yet we have this promise to our comfort, that we shall in no wise be tempted beyond our strength.

If we could thoroughly realise this, and in the hour of temptation use the mighty power within us, we should find it greater far than any evil whisper; but we so often forget how strong we are, and from idle neglect of our God-given will, follow the bent of those inclinations that lead to wrong-doing.

Lucy felt very glad when the last guest left Doolington Hall; it was quite a relief to find the house once more silent and empty. Our poor Lucy was getting so tired of life, that even pleasure was wearisome to her—the sound of a glad voice, the sight of a happy face; and this hidden grief was fast stealing all her sweet bright beauty. She was growing pale and listless, and wandered about the unused rooms like a little sorrowful ghost. Lady Evylin took her and Vivien to the seaside for a short

time, thinking that Lucy wanted change. She said nothing about it, but it pained her very much to see how evidently unhappy Lucy was ; and she was very tender and gentle with the girl, fancying she still sorrowed for her father.

They returned home sooner than they had intended, because one morning Carrie received a letter from Sir John, telling them that Marion was at Doolington. Clowden's mother was dead, and he had sent his wife to stay at the Hall. He wished to be alone for a short time, he said—alone with his grief ; and Marion, with ready tact, seeing how irksome even her society was to him, had immediately fallen in with his plans.

Carrie started at once for home on the receipt of her father's letter. They arrived quite late in the day, so Lucy did not see

Marion till the evening. When she came downstairs, dressed for dinner, she paused a moment at the open door before she entered the drawing-room.

Lady Clowden Strafford, tall, fair, and graceful in her trailing, sombre, craped dress, was standing by the fire, its red light flickering on her soft face, and throwing into clear relief the perfect pose of her magnificent figure ; the tall slight girl, who left her home now nearly five years back, had developed into a noble-looking woman.

She turned round, little flickers of light dancing on her coiled ruddy hair, and brightening the smile with which she welcomed Lucy, bending down and kissing her warmly. She had heard of Lucy's loss, and her heart was full of gentle pity when she saw the little white-faced girl ;

to her surprise, Lucy hid her face on her shoulder in a sudden burst of bitter weeping.

Marion said no word of comfort, but she held her there, smoothing the bright bowed head with a soft caressing touch. Could she have known, that the light of her life was this girl's darkness !

So they stood till Sir John came in ; he did not see who the two figures in the red firelight were till he came quite close ; and Lucy, at the sound of his well-known tread, raised her face, hushing her sobs ; and while he was speaking to Marion she escaped from the room, and did not appear again till the gong sounded for dinner.

Marion sat opposite her, and Lucy watched her, to see if she could trace any of the great, perfect happiness that *must*

belong to the woman who was Clowden's wife. "She is better worthy of him than I am," she sadly thought. She felt no jealousy—her warm admiration for Marion, and utter depreciation of herself, left no room for that; but her heart ached very wearily as she realised the other's superiority.

"And yet," she said to herself, "as it is not mine, I would rather *she* held his love than any other woman—she is worthy of him, of Clowden."

Lucy's love for Clowden was so pure, that she could love Marion because she was *his* wife. Those tears of sorrow had purged all passion from her strong deep love. Perhaps *that* had come in answer to her constant prayer. She loved him with a love that was her doom, but with a love that was never stirred by a single thought

that Marion's heart would have been angered to know.

The two children, Vivien and D'Arcy, came in to dessert; there was no likeness between them, Vivien towering like a young Colossus in his sturdy boyhood, his face wonderfully bright and beautiful; and little D'Arcy, who had already made friends with him, clinging to his hand, a slight, fragile, flaxen-haired child, fair and *spirituel*, with that far-off look in his large light-blue eyes so painfully suggestive to strangers of an early death. He seemed frightened at old Sir John's hearty voice, and kept timidly close to Vivien; even then recognising the firm strong spirit he so relied on in the after-time.

The shadow left the old Squire's face while Marion stayed at the Hall, and they at once fell into their old habit of constant

companionship, as though the missing link of those five years had never broken the chain of their lives. Somehow Marion's gentle presence seemed to brighten life for Lucy too; she was very affectionate in her manner towards the girl, and there was something about Marion that insensibly won love and confidence when you thoroughly knew her.

D'Arcy, too, grew very fond of Lucy; those gentle little children can often minister to a bitter heart-ache without jarring a single chord, as the sympathy of an older person, however sincere, might. Dear little D'Arcy, his clinging affectionate heart repayed in twofold love all those who were kind to him!

One mild winter's afternoon, Lucy was walking down the long leafless avenue with the two children. They were tired of play,

and had asked her to tell them a story ; she was trying to think of something to please them, when little D'Arcy left her side with a glad cry of—" Papa ! papa !"

And Lucy, looking up, saw Lord Clowden coming towards them, just the same as he looked those five weary years ago, when she went to meet him. Her heart stood still, but pride, a woman's shield, came to her relief, and helped her to answer his commonplace words of greeting, steadied the hand she held out to him, and sent the warm flush of welcome back to her heart cold and chill.

Clowden turned from her to Vivien ; and oh ! the fond love that shone from his eyes, and almost trembled in his voice as he said—

" Don't you know me, Viven ?"

He had thought often of this child, and

pictured their meeting ; and it chilled his heart when the boy hung back, his bright face full of perplexity.

“Don’t you remember me, Vivien?” he said again, and the proud, hard man bent down anxiously. “You were a little fellow when I went away, not much bigger than D’Arcy here ; wont you shake hands with me ?”

Did Clowden fancy it, or was the little brown hand given reluctantly ? But he would have given much to have felt Vivien clinging to him like D’Arcy did, as they turned towards the house.



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